

Key Lime Cheesecake (Icebox)

Source: Cooks Country, April/May 2005

We wanted our Key Lime Icebox Cheesecake recipe to have a supple, creamy texture—and great flavor too. We tried all manner of recipes, including those that relied on the stiffening power of Cool Whip, and found it was best to stick to the tried-and-true combination of heavy cream and cream cheese thickened with gelatin. Allowing the gelatin to hydrate in a portion of the cream, then bringing it to a boil in the microwave fully activated its thickening power. We whipped the heavy cream and cream cheese smooth before adding the cream and gelatin mixture to ensure the most thorough dispersal of the gelatin. Lime juice and lime zest added just enough spark to perk up the flavor of the tangy cream cheese, while a moderate amount of sugar kept the filling light. Our crumb crust utilized an unusual ingredient—we combined crushed animal crackers with a little butter to bind them, then used a measuring cup or flat-bottomed glass to pack the crumbs into the springform pan.

Ingredients

Crust

1 cup animal cracker crumbs
3 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon grated lime zest
4 tablespoons unsalted butter,
melted and kept warm

(Notes: Why not a graham cracker crust, exactly?)

Filling

1 ½ cups heavy cream
1 envelope unflavored gelatin
⅔ cup sugar
1 pound cream cheese, cut into 1-inch chunks and softened 30 to 45 minutes at room temperature
3 tablespoons lime juice plus 2 tablespoons grated zest from 1 lime
pinch table salt

Garnish

1 lime, halved pole-to-pole and sliced into 12 paper-thin wedges
sugar for dredging

Instructions

Don't rush the softening of the cream cheese. If microwaved, the cream cheese will cook slightly and eventually cause the entire cheesecake mixture to break. To speed up the process, cut the cream cheese into chunks and let it stand at room temperature for at least half an hour. When the cream cheese is no longer cold and gives easily under pressure, it's ready to use. Regular limes are just fine in this recipe.

For the crust: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Stir animal cracker crumbs, sugar, and zest together in medium bowl, then add butter and stir well with fork until mixture resembles wet sand. Transfer crumbs to 9-inch springform pan and, following photo at top of page 25, use bottom of measuring cup to firmly press crumbs into even layer over bottom of pan. Bake crust until fragrant and beginning to brown, about 13 minutes. Cool completely on wire rack, at least 30 minutes.

For the filling: Pour 1/4 cup heavy cream into microwave-safe measuring cup. Add gelatin and whisk to combine. Let stand until gelatin is softened, about 5 minutes, then microwave on high power for about 30 seconds, or until cream is bubbling and gelatin is completely dissolved. Set aside.

Using electric mixer, beat remaining 1 1/4 cups heavy cream and sugar in large bowl at medium-high speed until soft peaks form, about 2 minutes. Add cream cheese and beat at medium-low speed until combined, about 1 minute (a few coffee bean-sized lumps may remain). Scrape bottom and sides of bowl well with rubber spatula. Add lime juice and salt and continue to beat at medium-low speed until combined, about 1 minute. Scrape bottom and sides of bowl again. Increase speed to medium-high and beat until mixture is smooth, about 3 minutes. Add dissolved gelatin mixture and lime zest and continue to beat at medium-high until smooth and airy, about 2 minutes.

Pour filling into cooled crust and, using offset or icing spatula dipped in hot water, spread filling out evenly. Refrigerate for at least 6 hours, but for best results refrigerate overnight.

To serve, wrap hot, damp kitchen towel around springform pan, as shown in photo 1, below right. Unlock pan and carefully lift off sides. Slip thin metal spatula under crust and carefully slide cheesecake onto serving platter.

For the garnish: Coat both sides of lime slices in sugar and space evenly on top of cake, gently twisting the ends in opposite directions and pressing into the filling.

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