

## Carrot Cake

This is one of my signature cakes and a hit every time I serve it! It took me close to a year to get this recipe to a point where it was perfect. It's been tested and tweaked, baked as a loaf cake, a round tea-time cake and as cupcakes. My determination to perfect this recipe gives you insight into my need to find a carrot cake that ticked all the boxes for me. Some were too spicy, some were lacklustre, some were too fruity, others just too spongy, but finally it all came together. In fact, an Emirate friend of mine, Khulood Qayed, cannot be impressed by any of my other cakes (she says this gleefully) and often jokes that if it's not this carrot cake, then I simply shouldn't offer her anything else!



SERVES 8

FOR THE CAKE

2 C (500 ml) cake flour  
¾ C (200 ml) castor sugar  
2 tsp (10 ml) ground cinnamon  
2 tsp (10 ml) bicarbonate of soda  
1 tsp (5 ml) baking powder  
2 tsp (10 ml) ground dried naartjie (clementine) peel  
¼ tsp (1.25 ml) salt  
4 C (4 x 250 ml) grated carrots  
1½ C (375 ml) canola or vegetable oil  
4 medium eggs, beaten  
1 C (250 ml) chopped pecan nuts  
(I usually reserve about ¼ C [60 ml] chopped nuts for decorating)

CHEESE FROSTING

500 g cream cheese  
250 g butter, at room temperature  
2 tsp (10 ml) vanilla essence  
2 C (500 ml) icing sugar, sifted

1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C. Grease a ring mould baking tin.
2. Sift the flour, castor sugar, cinnamon, bicarbonate of soda, baking powder, naartjie peel and salt into a large bowl.
3. In a separate bowl, combine the grated carrots and the oil.
4. Slowly add the flour mixture to the carrot mixture, stirring until just mixed.
5. Add the beaten eggs and fold in – try not to over mix.
6. Stir in the chopped nuts so that they are coated with the batter.
7. Scoop the batter into the prepared baking tin.
8. Bake for 30–40 minutes and do a quick check to see if the cake is ready by inserting a cake tester or thin skewer into the centre of the cake. It should come out clean, with no streaks of batter. Add a few minutes if needed, because the baking time differs from oven to oven.
9. When done, remove from the oven and allow the cake to cool completely before turning it out onto a wire rack.
10. To make the frosting, blend the cream cheese, butter and vanilla essence until smooth (preferably in an electric mixer).
11. Gradually add the icing sugar to the cream cheese and butter mixture.
12. Blend until all the ingredients have amalgamated, or until smooth.
13. Once the cake has cooled completely, frost it with the cream cheese frosting and sprinkle with chopped nuts for that final finishing touch.

CHEF'S TIPS

Inspired by the flavour of our Sunday Cape Malay koeksisters, I couldn't stop myself from adding dried naartjie peel to the cake batter while I was developing this recipe. It provides a lovely warm and slightly citrusy flavour to the carrot cake. This batter can be divided (halved) to make 12 cupcakes. Bake for 10–12 minutes at 180 °C. For the carrot loaf cake, bake at 180 °C for 30–40 minutes.