



Regular and Holiday Cheesecake!

Ok here are MORE variations on a theme....

I sometimes run into surprises like extra people showing up and so have had to resort to some creative ways to stretch portions... also when guests just ***"want a small piece"*** I came up with making my cheesecake in a **9" x 13"** rectangle or square baking pan instead of the traditional spring form (you will see why below)

Anyway, from my experience, Cheesecake like all good things in life, favors those who plan ahead and take their time. Moreover, once you have the basics well in hand, there are endless new varieties to try to keep things interesting.

I will cover here the basics of cheesecake making and will then provide you with 3 different cheesecake (variation) recipes. NOTE: You will see all these different versions of cheesecake in the step photos to follow.

OK First, a plain NY cheesecake, perfect for all occasions. Next, with the Holidays coming fast upon us, let's talk about how to make that same cheesecake as a pumpkin swirl cheesecake, and lastly, a full-on 100% pumpkin cheesecake.

**Now, the Crust...SORRY but I am just NOT a graham cracker crust fan...
but if YOU are, then by all means proceed using your FAV recipe.**

I like a cookie crust and you can use my classic recipe which follows or I have used crushed (in the food processor) sugar cookies, crushed chocolate cookies, peanut butter cookies, Pecan Sandies, crushed Oreos etc in the same manner as graham cracker crust.

NOTE: For gluten free substitute rice flour or use Almond meal and chopped toasted pecans with the butter. Awesome!!! I have also used xylitol 2/3 cup instead of the sugar to make it sugar free.



For the classical cookie style crust, place in your mixing bowl:

- 1 1/2 cups King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 large egg



Blend on medium-low speed until the mixture comes together in large moist chunks.



Once the mixture resembles cookie dough, you are ready to press it into a greased 9" x 13" x 2" pan. Be sure to double check the 2" height measurement. You want plenty of room for all of the luscious filling.



NOTE: In the old days, I would put all of my dough in the center of the pan and push, pull and cuss it into all of the corners of the pan? Well no more! Instead, I break up the dough into lots of pieces and distribute them evenly over the bottom of the pan.

Then just work your way across the bottom of the pan, blending each chunk into the next in a nice even layer.



Voila! And, nary a curse word spoken. Be sure to press the dough up the sides of the pan to provide side support. About an inch up all around should do the trick. Then prick the base all over with a fork, and bake in a preheated 400°F for 15 minutes, or until lightly browned.

Remove from the oven and reduce the oven temperature to 325°F. **NOTE:** IF you ever do have a problem with shrinkage then place parchment paper down and fill up with dried beans and bake.

NOTE: Although the photos do not show it **BE SURE TO DO THIS** to get your cheesecake out with **EASE...**

I line the 13" X 9" X 2" pan with parchment, both length wise and width wise and be sure to leave the paper long by 6-8 inches, so that it comes up and over the sides of the pan.

*This gives me something to hold onto to lift the cake out in one piece.
Then once cooled, Cut the cheesecake using a ruler and a wet knife.*



Ok seriously, one of the most important parts of a smooth and creamy cheesecake filling is the cream cheese itself. Use a good quality cream cheese, and take the time to let it warm to room temperature. You will thank me for this!

As you can see above, there is a vast difference in temperature in cheese straight from the fridge (left) and cheese that has been left out for 2 hours (right).
Warm cream cheese means far fewer lumps in your filling.

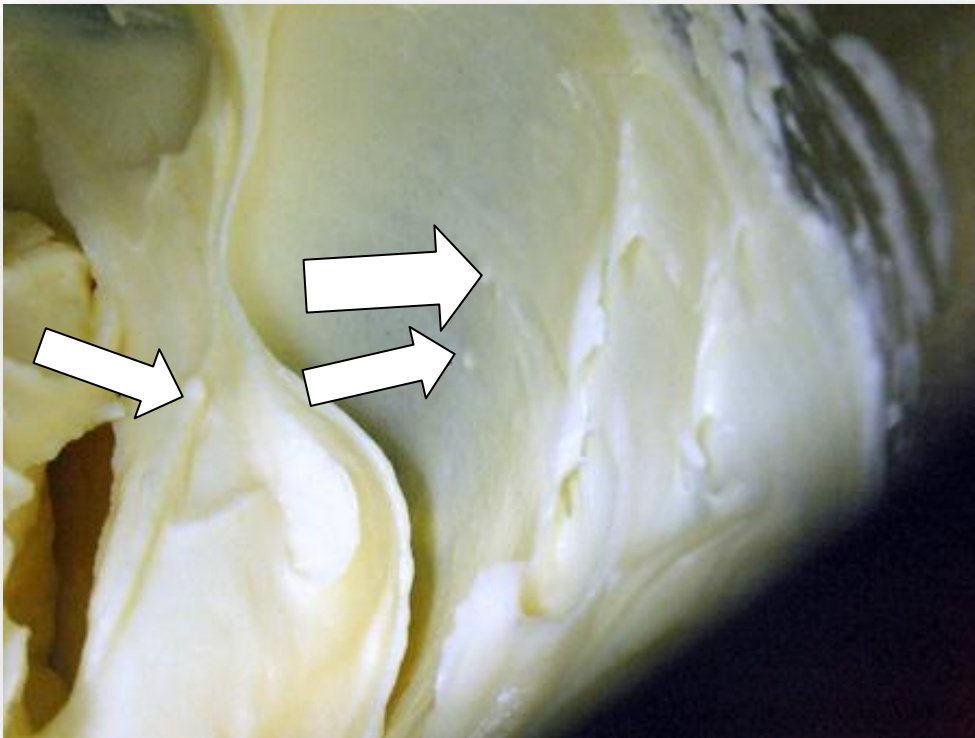


For your filling, place in the mixing bowl:

- 2 pounds (four 8-ounce packages) cream cheese, at room temperature
- 1 3/4 cups sugar
- 3 tablespoons King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour

Please BE SURE TO:

Mix at **low speed** with your paddle attachment until there are no lumps. Scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl at least twice during this process, to be sure no cheese is sticking.



NOTE: Stop the mixer every now and then to scrape down the bowl and check for lumps. As you can see, (ARROWS above) there are still a few in the mixture, so keep going on low speed for a few more minutes.

- zest of 1 lemon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 5 large eggs
- 1/2 cup sour cream



Then add as detailed:

- zest of 1 lemon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 5 large eggs
- 1/2 cup sour cream

When the initial mixture is fairly lump-free, add the lemon zest, salt, and vanilla, and mix to combine. Add the eggs, one at a time, mixing until incorporated, and scraping the mixing bowl between additions. **Stir in the sour cream on low speed.**

Hey, SO WHY can't we just set this baby on high and whip the Leap'n Ladybugs out of the filling you say...?

OK Sure, it would save time, but the beauty of cheesecake lies in its dense texture. Whipping on high speed incorporates more air than you want into the filling and will create bubbles in your finished cheesecake.

So, set your iPod up with a slow and dreamy music mix, and go with the low and slow.

What I listened to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEnem_wgFBw&feature=related

**** STOP HERE FOR PLAIN NY CHEESECAKE ****

Pour the filling over the crust and bake for 45 to 50 minutes, until the edges of the cake are set one inch in from the edge. **NOTE:** YES, The middle should still jiggle when you nudge the pan; in fact, the cake will look under-baked.

IMPORTANT: Measure the temperature of the cake an inch from the edge:
When it reaches 175°F, turn off the oven.



Another must-do for crack free cheesecake is a slow cool down.

Once you have turned the oven off, prop the door open with an oven mitt or foil ball and leave the cheesecake to “coast” for an hour. The filling will finish baking and will become set and the slow cool down will not shock the cake into cracking.

**Sooooooo, say you don’t want to stop at baking a plain cheesecake
as the fall holidays grow nearer...**

Care to give the Swirl a Whirl?

Then let’s continue...



For pumpkin swirl cheesecake: remove 1 cup of your prepared batter and mix it with 1/2 cup pumpkin puree (canned is fine), one egg, 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon, 1/4 teaspoon ginger and a pinch of allspice. Blend with a fork until the mixture is nice and smooth.

Pour your plain cheesecake batter into the prepared crust.
Dollop the pumpkin batter randomly over the surface and swirl gently with a knife, spreader or similar tool.

Bake as you would for the plain cheesecake,
including the jiggle test and long, slow cooling time.



Whoops great

The only thing was I got distracted and did not check this cheesecake early enough.

It baked to 182°F, so the proteins in the eggs began to tighten up and caused some cracking during the cooling stage. Still you get the idea and some careful cutting and a little whipped cream will take care of that though.

That's what I get for trying to show off to you (haha)

Anyway, chill the cheesecake for at least 6 hours. Overnight is best.

OMG YUMMO!!



Sooooo here you see how one pan of cheesecake = many different looks.

Using a few bits and bobs and leftover toppings from the fridge...
you can create a cheesecake tasting plate (see below) that will appeal to every guest.

So, NO Matter if you would rather have blueberry or cherry pie topping, chocolate sprinkles, toasted coconut, caramel pecan or mini chocolate chips topping...

Just Experiment and Have FUN!!!

NOTE: These all had the most amazing melt in your mouth texture.
Dense, smooth and creamy.

It also lifted right up and out of the pan using that parchment paper tip I told you about...
And dipping your knife in hot water then wiping clean will help make
cleaner cuts in your chilled cheesecakes.

See how by using the 13" X 9" X 2" pan I can cut out these bite sized bits...



For the “All Pumpkin” Cheesecake recipe please continue:

**Ok so you have MASTERED a Basic Cheesecake
and a Swirled Cheesecake under your belt...**

NOW try my full-flavored **“Full On”** pumpkin cheesecake (see photo below)



With a spicy gingersnap cookie crust this time, it makes a nice change from pumpkin pie for fall holiday feasts, and can be embellished with a little cinnamon; vanilla or maple syrup flavored whipped cream if desired.

Gingersnap Crust

1 1/4 cups gingersnap cookie crumbs
1/4 cup King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour
1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1/4 cup unsalted butter, melted

Filling

3 8-ounce packages cream cheese, at room temperature
1 1/34 cups sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
1/4 cup King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup pumpkin puree (**not pumpkin pie filling mix**)
5 large eggs
1/2 cup sour cream
Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease a 10" round spring form pan.

For the crust:

Combine all of the ingredients in the bowl of a food processor and pulse until evenly mixed. Press into the bottom of the spring form pan, and at least 1" up the sides of the pan. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes, just until you can smell the gingersnaps. Remove the crust from the oven, and reduce the oven temperature to 300°F.

NOTE: My current FAV thing is to use a mix of ½ gingersnap and ½ sugar cookie crumbs as the ginger snaps can be a bit overpowering to some tastes.

For the filling:

Place the cream cheese in the bowl of your mixer. **Blend on low speed** for a few minutes, until no more lumps remain. Add the sugar, flour and spices and mix for an additional 2 to 3 minutes. Be sure to stop the mixer at least twice to scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl.

Add the vanilla, pumpkin, and mix to combine. Add the eggs one at time, mixing well after each egg is added. Stir in the sour cream by hand. Pour the mixture into the prepared pan/crust and bake for 50 to 60 minutes.

The cake is ready when the center 2" of the cake is still a bit wobbly. The temperature measured 1" from the side of the cake should read 175°F. Turn off the oven, prop open the door, and allow the cake to slowly cool in the oven for one hour.

Remove the cake from the oven and chill, lightly covered for 4 to 8 hours before serving.

OK let's review those key cheesecake points one more time.

- Make sure your ingredients are **room temperature**, especially your cream cheese
- Blend well **to get rid of lumps** before proceeding.
- **Low and slow** is the key to mixing. Avoid introducing too much air
- Stay **with low and slow for baking** too.
- Test your cheesecake while **the center is still loose**.
- A long coast to the finish is the best plan.
- **Proper chilling** before serving will give you the best texture.

I really hope this has answered some or MOST of your burning cheesecake questions and I would love to hear about your results...

Like I said, cooking is a work in progress and I am always experimenting...

And having FUN!

Enjoy!