



Strawberry Tres Leches Cake

Tres Leches is well suited for cake mixes because the focus is not so much on the cake itself but the milk syrup and the interesting flavors you can infuse into the cake as it soaks. I found in testing that the cake is also well suited to a springform pan as the cake stays in that pan in the fridge to soak up the syrup, making prep and cleanup a snap. (Place a rimmed sheet pan underneath to catch any runaway juices.) You could absolutely add other fresh berries on top, serve with homemade lemon curd, and just take my ideas and run with them.

Makes 12 servings

Prep: 20 to 25 minutes

Bake: 45 to 50 minutes

Chill: 2 hours

- **Cake:**
 - Vegetable oil spray, for greasing the pan
 - 1 package (15.25 or 16.25 ounces) white or yellow cake mix
 - 1 package (3 ounces) strawberry gelatin
 - 3 large eggs
 - 2/3 cup water
 - 2/3 cup vegetable oil
 - 1 teaspoon grated fresh lemon zest, if desired (from one small lemon)
 - **Milk Syrup:**
 - 1 can (12 ounces) evaporated milk
 - 2/3 cup sweetened condensed milk (half of a 7-ounce can)
 - 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - **Garnish:**
 - Lightly sweetened real whipped cream
 - 1 cup sliced, sweetened strawberries
1. Place a rack in the center of the oven, and preheat the oven to 350°F. Mist the bottom and sides of a 9-inch springform pan with vegetable oil and set the pan aside.
 2. Place the cake mix and gelatin in a large mixing bowl, and stir to combine. Add the eggs, water, oil, and lemon zest, if desired. Beat with an electric mixer on low speed until blended, 30 seconds. Stop the machine, and scrape down the side of the bowl with a rubber spatula. Increase the mixer speed to medium and beat for 1 minute longer until the batter is smooth and fluffy. Pour the batter into the prepared pan, smoothing the top with a rubber spatula, and place the pan in the oven.
 3. Bake the cake until the top springs back when lightly pressed with a finger, 45 to 50 minutes. Transfer the pan to a wire rack to cool for 20 minutes. Run a knife around the edge of the cake, and unsnap the side of the pan. Allow the cake to come to room temperature, about 1 hour.
 4. Meanwhile, make the Milk Syrup. Place the evaporated milk, sweetened condensed milk, cream, and vanilla in a medium-size bowl and whisk to combine. Place the bowl in the refrigerator to chill while the cake cools.

5. To soak the cake, place the cake back in the springform pan, and lock the side. Poke 10 to 12 holes in the cake with a chopstick or the blunt end of a wooden skewer. Place the springform pan on a small baking sheet or into a larger 10-inch round cake pan. Remove the milk syrup from the fridge. Slowly ladle the syrup over the cake, allowing plenty of time for the syrup to soak into the holes of the cake, 4 to 5 minutes. Cover the springform pan with plastic wrap and place the pan in the fridge for at least 2 hours, preferably overnight. (A little of the syrup may leak out onto the pan.)
6. To serve, remove the pan from the refrigerator. Remove the plastic wrap, and unsnap the side of the pan. Transfer the cake (on the bottom of the pan) to a serving plate, or carefully run a long knife under the cake to remove it from the pan bottom and place it on the plate. Pile the whipped cream in the center of the cake, and spoon the berries over the cream. Slice and serve.

For a from-scratch, plain tres leches: Place 1 stick soft unsalted butter and 1 cup sugar in a large mixing bowl and beat on medium speed with an electric mixer until the mixture is light and fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes. Add 4 eggs, one at a time, beating about 15 seconds after each egg. Blend in 1 teaspoon vanilla, and set the batter aside. Sift together 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, 1 teaspoon baking powder, and 1/4 teaspoon salt into a small bowl. Add the flour mixture to the batter about 2 tablespoons at a time, blending on low speed after each addition. Pour the batter into the prepared springform pan, and place the pan in the oven. Continue with the recipe, letting the cake cool, then covering it with milk syrup, chilling and garnishing with whipped cream and loads of strawberries.