



My Favorite Pineapple-Upside Down Cake

This cake has seen a lot of variations through the years, whether flavoring the batter with lemon zest or almond extract or swapping out canned pears or sauteed apples for the pineapple. And it might have been once a yeast cake, as New York Times food editor Clementine Paddleford claimed the original pineapple upside-down was first baked by Jewish bakers in Chicago long before the 1920s. You can use fresh or canned pineapple in this recipe. And don't be concerned that the batter is runny. You do need a 12-inch cast iron skillet, so measure your skillet from top rim to rim. If you have a smaller skillet, you can still make this cake, but you'll need to bake it in two smaller skillets.

Makes 12 to 16 servings

Prep: 30 to 35 minutes

Bake: 40 to 45 minutes

Topping:

1 ripe pineapple (about 2 to 3 pounds), or 1 can (20 ounces) pineapple slices packed in juice, about 10 slices, and 10 maraschino cherries, optional

6 tablespoons unsalted butter

3/4 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed

Cake:

1 cup whole milk

4 tablespoons (2 ounces; 1/2 stick) unsalted butter

2 teaspoons vanilla

2 cups granulated sugar

4 large eggs

1/3 cup vegetable oil

2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

1 1/4 teaspoons salt

1. Cut the top off the pineapple, slice off the peel, quarter it lengthwise, and remove the core. Cut the pineapple quarters into 3/8-inch crosswise slices, and set them aside.

2. Place the butter in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat to melt, about 2 minutes. Stir in the brown sugar until the mixture bubbles, about 4 minutes. Pull the skillet off the heat. Arrange the pineapple slices in concentric circles on top of the butter and sugar, beginning at the edges of the pan and overlapping the pieces slightly. Set the pan aside. See Note.

2. For the cake, place the milk and butter in a small saucepan over medium heat until the butter melts, about 2 minutes. Stir in the vanilla and set aside. Place the sugar and eggs in a large mixing bowl and beat with an electric mixer on medium speed until the mixture is thick and lemon colored, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the oil and blend to combine. Set aside.

3. Place the flour in a small bowl, and stir in the baking powder and salt. Alternately add the flour mixture to the egg and sugar mixture with the hot milk mixture, beginning and ending with the flour and beating on low speed until smooth. The batter will be runny. Pour the batter over the pineapple in the skillet, and place the pan in the oven.

4. Bake until the cake is golden and tests done by lightly pressing on the center of the cake, about 40 to 45 minutes. It should spring back. Remove the skillet from the oven, and let the cake rest in the skillet for 5 minutes. Run a knife around the outside of the pan to loosen it. Place a flat platter, board, or plate over the skillet and invert the skillet so the pineapple is right-side up. Replace any pineapple still stuck to the bottom of the skillet. If desired, drizzle the top of the cake with dark rum.

5. Serve warm, or let the cake cool 30 minutes, then slice and serve with whipped cream, if desired.