

How to Bake the Perfect Cheesecake

Cheesecakes have stood the test of time. And well they should—they are wonderfully decadent desserts. We'll give you principles to help you understand cheesecakes. If you understand the principles, you can create your own recipes. If you understand and practice these principles, chances are you will make wonderful cheesecakes.

Principle #1:

A cheesecake is a custard, not a cake. As a custard, the cheesecake should be thick, rich and creamy. As with any custard, a cheesecake relies on the proteins in the eggs to give it structure. The proteins coagulate as the temperature approaches 160 degrees. If it over bakes, the custard becomes dry.



Principle #2:

A long, slow bake allows for a more uniform internal temperature. Never bake over 350 degrees. We prefer a dark pan to uniformly absorb heat, not a reflective pan.

Principle #3:

Don't over bake your cheesecake. Most cheesecakes are over baked and they tend to be dry, not creamy. An over baked cheesecake tends to crack. The cheesecake is done when it is still jiggly but not soupy. The top of the cheesecake will jiggle as a whole and the center two inches will look softer. If the top is doing anything but just starting to blush a golden color, you have probably over baked the cheesecake. Do not stick a knife or a toothpick in the center. It is not a reliable test and it may start a crack.

Principle #4:

Beat the cream cheese until it is soft and smooth. It's easier to make a smooth mixture of the cream cheeses if you start with softened cream cheese. Take the cream cheese from the refrigerator at least an hour before mixing. Beat the cheese with the paddle attachment, not the whip.

Principle #5:

Mix the ingredients into the cream cheese; don't whip the ingredients. If too much air is incorporated into the filling, the cheesecake will puff when baked and sink as it cools. With too much air incorporated into the filling, cracks are likely to develop.

Principle #6:

Custards tend to be soft and may weep. To give your cheesecake more structure, consider adding one to two tablespoons of cornstarch or flour. For a creamier cheesecake, leave the starch out.

Principle #7:

Cheesecakes rely primarily on eggs for the structure. Not only does the egg mixture have to reach 160 to 170 degrees to coagulate, but the filling must have enough eggs. In our experience, one egg per eight-ounce package of cream cheese plus a little milk or cream is about right.

Principle #8:

Cheesecakes are easier to remove from a pan after they have cooled slightly. Let the cheesecake cool for ten minutes and then with a spatula or thin-bladed knife, run the blade between the cake and the pan. If you let the cheesecake cool for any longer than that, it may start to contract and, with the cake stuck to the pan, crack. A nonstick pan not only makes the release easier but may help keep the cheesecake from cracking.

Troubleshooting My Cheesecake

My cheesecakes always develop cracks across the tops. What causes that?: Too much air entrained in the batter is usually what causes cracks in the tops of cheesecakes. To avoid the, don't over mix. Whisk the eggs before adding them to the batter and mix on low speed just until blended. If there are other ingredients to add, mix them in with a spatula.

How do I tell when my cheesecake is done?: There are two ways to tell if your cheesecake is done. The most foolproof is with a knife or spatula. Slip it into the center of the cheesecake. If it is done, the knife will come out clean. Sticking a knife in the cake mars the top surface with a cut. With experience, you can tell when the cheesecake is baked with the "jiggle test". The cheesecake will be almost set when you try to jiggle it. Wee suggest using the knife test for your first few cheesecakes and jiggle the cake. By observing how a baked cheesecake jiggles, you'll soon be able to tell without the knife.

What is the best way to remove the pan so that it does not stick? : Immediately after removing the cheesecake from the oven, place it on a wire rack to cool. Let the cheesecake set in the pan for about ten minutes then loosen the crust from the pan with the edges of a thin-bladed metal spatula. After about forty-five minutes, remove the ring. It should fall away easily from the cheesecake. Allow the cheesecake to finish cooling. Chill thoroughly before cutting.

What's the Best Way to Cut a Cheesecake?: Use the right knife, a sharp, thin-bladed knife. Don't use a serrated knife as filling and crumbs tend to stick to the serrations. Cut with a downward pressure, dragging the knife as little as possible. After each cut, wash and dry the knife so that you have a clean blade slicing through the cheesecake.

Caramel Pear & Toasted Pecan Cheesecake

1 2/3 cup graham cracker crumbs
1/2 cup butter, melted
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
2 cup dried pears
1 cup water
2 eight-ounce packages of cream cheese
2 cups cottage cheese
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/4 cup granulated sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 large eggs
2 large egg yolks
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
3/4 cup pecan pieces, toasted
caramel ice cream topping

1. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.
2. In a 9-inch springform pan, mix the graham cracker crumbs, melted butter, and sugar together. Press the mixture across the bottom of the pan and up the sides to form the crust. Put the crust in refrigerator while you mix the filling.
3. Add the pears and water to a small saucepan. Bring the pan to a simmer over low heat. Cover and let stand for three or four minutes, until the water is absorbed. Set aside to cool. Once cooled, chop in a food processor until almost pureed.
4. While the pears are cooling, make the crust.
5. With the whip attachment and your stand-type mixer, slowly beat the sugars, salt, and cream cheese together until smooth. Add the cottage cheese and blend in. Add the eggs and yolks one at a time, slowly beating after each. Add the pears and vanilla and mix until nearly smooth.
6. Bake in a 9-inch springform pan for 45 minutes or until done. Let cool on a wire rack. Drizzle with caramel syrup and sprinkle with pecans.

Pecan Praline Cheesecake

1 3/4 cups crushed graham crackers
2 tablespoons sugar
4 tablespoons butter, melted
3 8-ounce packages of cream cheese, softened
3 large eggs
1 1/4 cups brown sugar
2 tablespoons flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/4 cup whipping cream
3/4 cup chopped pecans
2/3 cup brown sugar
1/3 cup butter
1 tablespoon light corn syrup
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
15 to 20 pecan halves



1. Crush the graham crackers. Mix the crumbs with the sugar and melted butter in a ten-inch round springform pan or a nine-inch square springform pan. Press the mixture into a crust across the bottom of the pan and up the sides. Put the crust in the refrigerator to set up while you prepare the filling and the topping.
2. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Mix the cream cheese with the paddle attachment of your stand-type mixer set at medium speed until smooth and creamy, about five minutes. Add the eggs, 1 1/4-cups brown sugar, flour, salt, vanilla, and cream, and blend together until smooth. Do not over beat. Too much air in the filling will cause the cake to crack. Fold in the chopped pecans.
3. Pour the cream cheese filling into the crust. Bake for 50 to 55 minutes or until the top just starts to turn golden and the center of the cake is just barely jiggly. Cool on a wire rack.
4. After the cheesecake has cooled, make the topping. Heat the 2/3-cup brown sugar and 1/3-cup butter together with the corn syrup over low heat until the mixture is bubbly. Continue cooking over low heat for 4 or 5 minutes or until the topping is smooth with no sugar crystals. Pour the hot topping over the cooled cheesecake. Garnish with pecan halves and a cherry. Serve chilled.

White Chocolate Cheesecake

1 2/3 cup graham cracker crumbs
1/2 cup butter, melted
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
4 8-ounce packages of cream cheese
1 1/3 cups granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
4 large eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 1/3 cups white chocolate wafers or 8 ounces of white chocolate baking bars

1. Preheat the oven 325 degrees.
2. In a 9-inch springform pan, mix the graham cracker crumbs, melted butter, and sugar together. Press the mixture across the bottom of the pan and up the sides to form the crust. Put the crust in refrigerator while you mix the filling.
3. With the paddle attachment of your stand-type mixer, beat the cream cheese and sugar together. Add the salt, eggs and vanilla and beat until smooth. Melt the chocolate. Drizzle in the melted chocolate while the beaters are running. Pour into the crust.

Bake for 50 minutes or until the cake is done. Let cool on a wire rack. After ten minutes, loosen the sides with a spatula and remove the ring. Refrigerate the cheesecake to cool completely.

German Chocolate Cheesecake

2 cups chocolate graham cracker crumbs (about two inner packages of graham crackers). Chocolate cookie crumbs may be substituted.

6 tablespoons butter, melted.

2 1/2 eight-ounce packages of cream cheese

1 cup granulated sugar

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1/4 teaspoon salt

3 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla

2 tablespoons milk

1 cup chopped pecans or walnuts

Prepared Caramel Topping

Prepared Hot Fudge Topping

1. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees.
2. In a nine-inch spring form pan, mix the cracker crumbs and the melted butter. Press the crumb mixture into a crust across the bottom and about one inch up the sides. Bake the crust for eight minutes.
3. In a large bowl, cream the cream cheese with the sugar. Add the flour and salt. Add the eggs, vanilla, and milk all at once. Mix until just combined, scraping down the sides of the bowl. Pour the filling mix into the crust.
4. Bake for ten minutes at 450 degrees. Lower the temperature to 200 degrees and bake for an additional 35 to 40 minutes or until the cheesecake filling is set.
5. After the cheesecake has cooled for ten minutes, with a sharp knife, loosen the edges of the cheesecake from the pan so that the cake will pull away from the pan as it cools. Remove the rim of the pan after it has cooled for about forty-five minutes.
6. Drizzle the cheesecake with caramel and then with chocolate. Sprinkle nuts on the cake. Refrigerate until completely cool before serving.

Pumpkin Cheesecake in a Gingersnap Crust

1 1/2 cups crushed gingersnaps

1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts or pecans

1/4 cup brown sugar

4 tablespoons butter, melted

3 8-ounce packages of cream cheese

3/4 cup granulated sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt

3 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 1/3 cup pumpkin puree

1/4 cup whipping cream or yogurt

1/2 teaspoon allspice

1/2 tablespoon cinnamon

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
2. Crush the gingersnaps. Mix the crumbs with the nuts, brown sugar, and melted butter in a nine or ten-inch springform pan. Press the mixture into a crust across the bottom of the pan and up the sides. Put the crust in the refrigerator to set up while you prepare the filling.
3. For the cheesecake, in the bowl of your stand-type mixer, beat the cream cheese, salt, and sugar together. Beat in the eggs (one at a time) and vanilla. Set about 1 1/2 cups of the mixture aside for the topping.
4. To the remaining filling, add the pumpkin, whipping cream and spices. Beat until well-mixed. Pour the filling into the prepared crust. Carefully spoon the set-aside topping over the top of the pumpkin-cheesecake filling.
5. Bake for 70 to 80 minutes or until the top starts to brown and the center of the cake is just barely jiggly. Cool completely and then chill in the refrigerator before serving.