

angel food cake

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Angel Food Cake

Egg whites, sugar, flour and nothing else — no yolk, no butter, no oil, no chemical leavening. It rises to twice the height of a butter cake of the same weight and it is the only cake in common use that is fat-free by construction. An American invention, tied to the spread of the rotary egg beater and to households with surplus whites from custard-making.

Everything about the method exists to protect a foam that has nothing to fall back on.

What makes it work

- **Not a trace of fat, anywhere.** Fat destroys an egg white foam. One drop of yolk, a greasy bowl, a plastic bowl that has held butter — any of them and the cake will not rise. Use metal or glass, wiped with vinegar.
- **Cream of tartar stabilises the foam.** The acid lowers the pH and the protein network holds. Two teaspoons is not a garnish.
- **Whip to soft, droopy peaks, not stiff.** An over-whipped white cannot stretch further in the oven and the cake tears and collapses.
- **Never grease the tin.** The batter climbs the bare metal wall. A greased tin gives a cake that slides back down as it bakes — the single most common failure.
- **Cool it upside down.** Invert the tube pan onto its feet or over a bottle neck the moment it leaves the oven, and leave it hanging for at least two hours. Gravity holds the structure while it sets. Cooled right-side up, it compresses under its own weight.

Ingredients

One 25 cm tube pan. Serves 12.

- 12 egg whites, about 360 g, at room temperature
- 300 g caster sugar, 100 g of it sifted with the flour
- 130 g cake flour
- 8 g cream of tartar
- 3 g fine salt
- 2 tsp vanilla — see [Pure vanilla extract](#)
- ½ tsp [almond extract](#), optional

Method

Heat the oven to **175 °C / 350 °F**. Sift the flour with 100 g of the sugar three times — this is aeration, and it matters.

Whip the whites with the salt until frothy, add the cream of tartar, and whip to soft peaks. Add the remaining 200 g of sugar a tablespoon at a time, whipping until the foam is glossy and holds a peak that curls over at the tip. Whip in the extracts.

Sift a quarter of the flour mixture over and fold gently. Repeat three times.

Spoon into an ungreased tube pan, run a knife through the batter to break large bubbles, and level the top. Bake **35–40 minutes**, until deep gold and springy.

Invert immediately and leave hanging two hours. Free it with a thin knife around the edge and the tube.

Notes

- **Room-temperature whites whip higher** than cold ones. Separate them cold — it is easier — then leave them on the counter 30 minutes.
- Twelve yolks are the by-product. Use them for [custard](#), pastry cream, ice cream, or hollandaise.

- **Cut with a serrated knife, sawing.** A straight blade compresses it.
- **Keeps two days** in a covered container, and stales fast because it has no fat to hold moisture.

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