

crumb cake

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Crumb Cake

New York and New Jersey crumb cake: a thin layer of tender yellow cake under a layer of crumb topping twice as deep as the cake itself. It descends from the German *Streuselkuchen*, and the American version's distinguishing feature is the ratio — the topping is the dish, and the cake is there to hold it up.

What makes it work

- **The crumb is made with melted butter, not cold butter.** Melted butter mixed into flour, sugar and

cinnamon makes a dough you break into boulders by hand. Cold butter rubbed in gives the small sandy streusel of a coffee cake, which is a different topping. See [sour cream coffee cake](#) for that one.

- **Squeeze the crumb into big pieces, then break them.** Aim for chunks the size of a hazelnut and larger. They soften slightly but hold.
- **A firm, low-rise cake layer.** Baking powder is kept modest and the batter is thick, or the cake rises through the topping and the layers swap places.
- **Put the crumb on gently.** Drop it over the batter without pressing, or it sinks.
- **Powdered sugar only when completely cold,** or it dissolves.

Ingredients

One 23 cm square tin. Serves 9 generously.

Crumb topping:

- 340 g all-purpose flour
- 150 g light brown sugar
- 100 g granulated sugar
- 12 g ground [cinnamon](#)
- 4 g fine salt
- 225 g unsalted butter, melted

Cake:

- 190 g all-purpose flour
- 120 g granulated sugar
- 5 g baking powder
- 2 g baking soda
- 3 g fine salt
- 85 g unsalted butter, softened
- 1 [egg](#) plus 1 yolk
- 120 ml buttermilk or sour cream — see [buttermilk recipes](#)
- 2 tsp vanilla — see [Pure vanilla extract](#)

Method

Heat the oven to **175 °C / 350 °F**. Butter and line the tin.

For the topping, whisk the flour, both sugars, cinnamon and salt, pour in the melted butter, and stir with a fork until it forms a shaggy dough. Leave it to firm up while you make the cake.

For the cake, beat the butter into the flour, sugar, powder, soda and salt until sandy. Whisk the egg, yolk, buttermilk and vanilla and beat in, one minute.

Spread the batter in the tin — it is thick, and a wet offset spatula helps.

Squeeze handfuls of the crumb mixture into clumps and break them over the batter in an even, deep layer. Do not press down.

Bake **40–45 minutes**, until a skewer in the cake layer comes out clean.

Cool completely, then dust heavily with powdered sugar.

Notes

- **The topping-to-cake ratio is the argument.** The bakery standard in northern New Jersey is about 2 : 1 by volume, which is what this recipe gives.
- Apple, blueberry or rhubarb can go on the batter before the crumb; toss the fruit in a spoonful of flour first. See [apple](#) and [Rhubarb](#).
- **Keeps three days** covered. The crumb softens; a few minutes in a 160 °C oven brings it back.

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