

pound cake

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Pound Cake

A pound each of butter, sugar, egg and flour — the oldest written cake formula in English, and one that predates chemical leavening entirely. Everything that lifts it is air beaten into the butter and steam. The French *quatre-quarts*, four quarters, is the same cake, and the Italian and German versions differ mainly in what flavours the fat.

What makes it work

- **All the lift is mechanical.** Cream for six to eight minutes, longer than any other cake on this site, and stop only when the mixture is white and looks like frosting. Under-creamed pound cake is a brick, and there is no baking powder to rescue it.
- **Everything at 20 °C.** Butter, eggs, milk. A cold egg splits the emulsion; a split batter bakes greasy and dense.
- **Add the eggs one at a time, beating a full minute between.** Four minutes of patience buys the whole texture.
- **Low and slow — 160 °C for an hour.** A pound cake baked hot domes, cracks violently and stays raw inside. The crack along the top is expected and desirable; a volcano is not.
- **The tin must be properly prepared,** buttered and floured into every corner of the loaf or bundt.

Ingredients

One 23 × 13 cm loaf, or a small bundt. Serves 10.

- 225 g unsalted butter, softened
- 225 g caster sugar
- 4 [eggs](#), room temperature
- 225 g all-purpose flour
- 4 g fine salt
- 2 tsp vanilla — see [Pure vanilla extract](#)
- optional: 60 ml [milk](#) or sour cream for a slightly lighter crumb
- optional: 5 g baking powder, the modern concession

Method

Heat the oven to **160 °C / 325 °F**. Butter and flour the tin.

Cream the butter and sugar for six to eight minutes at medium-high speed, scraping down twice. It should be nearly white.

Beat in the eggs one at a time, a minute each, then the vanilla.

Sift in the flour and salt and fold — or mix on the lowest speed — until just combined. Fold in the milk if using.

Scrape into the tin, level, and run a buttered knife down the centre lengthwise if you want the crack to open neatly.

Bake **60–70 minutes**, until a skewer comes out clean. Cool 15 minutes in the tin, then turn out.

Notes

- **The flavour variations are all in the fat and the liquid:** brown butter, lemon zest and juice, almond extract, a split vanilla pod, or 60 ml of rum brushed on while warm.
- **It keeps a week** wrapped, and improves for the first two days as the crumb equalises. It is the best keeper of any cake in this folder.
- Slices toast and griddle beautifully in butter — the standard use for day-four pound cake.

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