

Pistachio Meringue Cake with Fresh Citrus, Candied Kumquats, and Cardamom Caramel Sauce

MAKES 1 (1-POUND) LOAF; SERVES 8

This is an easy and versatile nutty cake that makes use of the egg whites you might have left over after making ice cream or Hollandaise. Pistachios are delicious in this cake, but you could easily substitute hazelnuts or walnuts if that's what you have on hand. It's great with a variety of winter citrus, too. The combination of these flavors reminds me of something I'd eat in Sicily or North Africa.

The cake is topped with a basic salted caramel sauce flavored with cardamom that is designed to be pourable straight from the fridge. This makes it easy to stir it into coffee, pour over ice cream, or eat from a spoon. Simply omit the cardamom if you're looking for a basic salted-caramel sauce.

To get the most volume from your egg whites, be sure that the mixing bowl has no film of fat in it and that there are no bits of egg yolk in the whites.

CANDIED KUMQUATS

½ cup hot water
1 cup sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
10 medium or 15 small kumquats

CAKE

10 tablespoons butter, plus
1 tablespoon softened butter
1 tablespoon dark rum
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1¼ cups raw, unsalted shelled pistachios
1¼ cups sugar
⅔ cup all-purpose flour
6 egg whites
½ teaspoon salt

CARDAMOM CARAMEL SAUCE

1 cup heavy cream
¼ teaspoon decorticated (outer green husk removed) cardamom seeds, toasted and ground
1 cup sugar
¼ cup hot water
¾ teaspoon flaky finishing salt

FOR ASSEMBLY

1 blood orange
1 navel orange
1 red grapefruit
Whipped crème fraîche

MAKE THE CANDIED KUMQUATS In a small saucepan, stir together the hot water, sugar, and salt. Place over medium-low heat and cook the syrup while you slice the kumquats about 1/8 inch thick. Discard the ends and the seeds, then add the kumquats to the syrup and bring to a bare simmer. Cook until the fruit is soft and translucent, 7 to 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and let the kumquats cool in their syrup. The kumquats can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

MAKE THE CAKE Preheat the oven to 350°F. Brush an 8½ by 4½-inch loaf pan with the 1 tablespoon softened butter.

In a small saucepan over medium-low heat, melt the 10 tablespoons of butter. Stir in the rum and vanilla and set aside to cool.

Place 1 cup of the pistachios and ¾ cup of the sugar in a food processor and grind together until the pistachios are sandy, about 10 seconds. If there are too many big pieces of pistachio, they will deflate your cake, so grind for a few more seconds if necessary, but keep an eye on the nuts to ensure you don't overprocess them. They should look powdery, not like they are about to form a paste. Add the flour and process for about 2 seconds to combine. Set aside.

Spread the remaining ¼ cup pistachios on a small baking sheet and bake until lightly toasted, 3 to 4 minutes. Since pistachios already have a brown skin and crisp texture, it can be hard to tell when they're toasted. If you are not sure, allow them to cool and then taste one. You're looking for an only slightly toasted flavor and a remaining green interior. Roughly chop the pistachios and set aside.

In a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whisk the egg whites on medium speed for about 1½ minutes. They will be slightly foamy. Add the remaining ½ cup sugar and the salt and whip on medium speed for 1 minute. Use a rubber spatula to scrape the sugar from the sides of the bowl, then whip the egg whites on medium speed for 8 more minutes, until all of the granules of sugar and salt have dissolved and the egg whites are stiff and glossy.

Using a rubber spatula, fold one-third of the pistachio mixture into the egg whites. Repeat with the remaining pistachio mixture in two batches, folding just until combined. Add the melted butter–rum mixture and again fold just until combined.

Pour the batter into the prepared loaf pan. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes, until the cake pulls away slightly from the sides of the pan, feels springy to the touch, and a skewer inserted in the center comes out clean. Let the cake cool in the pan on a wire rack for 20 minutes. Turn it out onto the rack and let cool completely.

MAKE THE CARDAMOM CARAMEL SAUCE In a small saucepan, combine the cream and cardamom and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Turn off the heat and let

the cardamom steep on the burner while you cook the sugar.

Put the sugar, hot water, and salt in a heavy saucepan with a tight-fitting lid. Pour in both the water and the sugar carefully, keeping the sugar crystals from splashing around the sides of the pan. It may seem like you have very little in the bottom of the pan, but you want to have lots of room when you add the cream because the mixture will spit and bubble. Place the pan over low heat and stir the contents with a wooden spoon until the sugar is dissolved; try to dissolve the sugar before the mixture boils. Rinse your spoon well to remove any sugar crystals and don't stir the mixture again until you add the cream. If there are any unmelted crystals, they can cause the caramel sauce to crystallize instead of remaining smooth. Cover the pan, turn the heat to medium, and cook for 5 minutes to help create condensation to wash down sugar crystals from the sides of the pot. Uncover and continue to cook the sugar until it starts to take on some color. At first it will be just a little blond or caramel colored in certain spots. Keep cooking until the sugar starts to smoke a little and turns deep mahogany brown. Don't worry about the smoke and dark color; undercaramelization results in a flat, undeveloped taste. Remove the pan from the heat and pour in about ¼ cup of the hot cream, stirring with a long-handled wooden spoon. The caramel will bubble like crazy—don't get burned! Keep stirring and slowly add the remaining cream. Continue stirring after all of the cream has been added, until the bubbling has calmed down. Strain the caramel sauce through a fine-mesh strainer into a metal bowl, stirring occasionally as it cools. Taste for salt and adjust as necessary. The sauce will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

ASSEMBLE THE DISH Supreme the citrus fruits. Place the citrus segments in a strainer set over a small bowl. Cut the cake into 1-inch slices. Pour a small pool of caramel sauce on each plate, place a slice of cake overlapping the sauce, and arrange a mixture of the citrus segments alongside. Top with a dollop of whipped cream, a few wheels of candied kumquats, and a sprinkling of toasted pistachios.

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