

## **Sticky Date Cake with warm Orange Blossom-Carmel Sauce**

Remember the poke-and-pour cakes of another era, using colorful gelatin and white cake? We're poking and pouring here too, but with a brown sugar caramel that echoes the flavors of the moist date cake. Even the wariest of date-eaters will spoon this cake up with abandon. When I brought big slices to lunch with some of my oldest childhood friends, they unanimously declared dates on their don't-eat-those list. But then they took a bite, and ended up eating the entire cake before lunch. This recipe makes 8 servings.

### **For the cake:**

¼ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus 1 tablespoon to coat the pan  
1¼ cups water  
1¾ cups chopped pitted dates (about 20 Medjool dates)  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
¼ teaspoon kosher salt  
½ packed cup light brown sugar  
2 large eggs  
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

### **For the caramel sauce:**

6 tablespoons unsalted butter  
⅞ teaspoon kosher salt  
1 cup heavy whipping cream  
¾ packed cup light brown sugar  
Few drops orange blossom water

### **For the whipped cream:**

1 cup heavy whipping cream  
1 tablespoon granulated sugar

Arrange a rack in the center of the oven and pre-heat the oven to 350°F. Coat an 8-inch cake pan with about ½ tablespoon of butter. Line the bottom with parchment, and then lightly butter the top of the parchment with the remaining ½ tablespoon of butter.

Heat the water in a medium saucepan over high heat to boiling. Add the dates, bring the mixture back to a boil, and then reduce the heat to medium and simmer for 5 minutes to soften the dates, giving them a stir every so often. Remove the dates from the heat and stir in the baking soda (the mixture will foam up a little). Set this aside.

In a small bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt.

In the bowl of an electric mixer, beat the ¼ cup butter and the brown sugar on high speed until the mixture is light and fluffy, about 2 minutes, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl mid-way through beating. Add the eggs one at a time, mixing thoroughly after each addition and stopping to scrape the bowl as you go; the mixture may look slightly curdled, but it is fine.

Add the dates and vanilla and continue to beat scraping down the bowl. Slowly add the flour to the mixture on low speed, and thoroughly combine. The batter will be somewhat thin.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake for 30 to 40 minutes, or until the cake is golden brown and springs back when touched in the center.

While the cake bakes, make the caramel sauce. In a small saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the salt, cream, brown sugar, and orange blossom water and bring it to a boil, and then reduce the heat to a simmer, whisking constantly until the mixture is combined and slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Reserve about ½ cup of the caramel sauce for serving.

While the cake is still warm, poke it liberally all over with a toothpick or skewer, all the way out to the edges. Spoon a few tablespoons of the caramel sauce evenly over the surface of the cake all the way out to the edges, one tablespoon at a time and using the back of the spoon to spread the caramel around while it is absorbed by the cake. Let the cake rest for 15 minutes.

Turn the cake out onto a platter, with the bottom side facing up, and poke this side liberally with a toothpick or skewer, again all the way out to the edges, and slowly spoon several tablespoons of the caramel sauce over the cake in the same way you did on the other side, one tablespoon at a time to let the caramel absorb into the cake. Let some of the caramel drip decoratively down the sides of the cake. Allow the cake to rest for 15 minutes or up to several hours, uncovered, before serving.

Make the whipped cream by beating the cream with the sugar in a medium bowl until soft peaks form. Chill the whipped cream until you are ready to serve the cake.

Reheat the reserved caramel sauce before serving if it has thickened too much to pour. Cut the cake into wedges and serve each piece with a spoonful of caramel sauce and whipped cream on top.

***Enjoy and prepare yourself for compliments.***