

Cheesecake Success Tips

As popular as cheesecakes are, many people do not know how to make them, and are therefore at the mercy of restaurant pastry chefs (who will charge \$4-\$6 per serving). Perhaps you believe you can't do it because anything that good must be difficult to make. In fact, most cheesecakes are really quite easy to make. The few basic techniques you need are readily mastered, and if you follow instructions carefully, you should create a superb cheesecake the first time you try. All you need is the right equipment and supplies (and the right attitude), but to make the process easier for you, I have a few tips I'll pass along. Most of these are typical of those you would find in just about any cheesecake recipe book.

MIXING:

1. Have all the ingredients at room temperature before beginning.
2. Blend cream cheese and sugars at medium speed until smooth and creamy before adding eggs. Then use the lowest speed of your electric mixer for the rest of the mixing, and mix only as long as necessary to get everything well mixed.
3. Avoid using the balloon whip on a KitchenAid mixer. It introduces an excessive amount of air, which tends to cause cracks in the surface.

BAKING:

1. Use a pan of water on the bottom of the oven to add moisture to the oven. (I use an old rusty 13x9 roasting pan. It's ugly, but eventually, every springform pan will leak, and this way I don't need to clean up the oven.)
2. NEVER open the oven during the first 75% of the baking time. And even after that, don't open it any more or any longer than necessary.
3. Make sure the oven temperature is correct (Use an oven thermometer), and don't overbake. If the edges are set, even if the center still jiggles a bit, it's probably done. It will firm up as it cools.

COOLING:

1. As soon as the cheesecake is out of the oven, run a knife around the inside edge of the pan. This allows the cake to contract properly as it cools.
2. Leave it on a wire rack at least until you can handle the pan with bare hands before refrigerating it. Do not cover it until it has thoroughly chilled, at least a few hours. Then cover it tightly to keep it from drying out.
3. Any garnishes should be added shortly before serving.

A few of my own personal feelings about baking and eating cheesecakes:

1. There is enough effort, time, and expense involved in making a cheesecake to make me want to make sure the results are worth all that trouble, so I don't cut costs on ingredients. I use the best I can find, because the difference in cost is never likely to be enough to make up for the loss in quality from using cheaper ingredients.
2. I'm always willing, even eager, to share recipes (not just cheesecakes), and I'm always looking for new ones. If you run across a cheesecake you'd really like to try, and you aren't sure you're ready to tackle it yourself, let me know, and I'll give it a try, and share the results with you.
3. Don't worry about calories. Practice **moderation**, and you can afford it.