

RHUBARB & CUSTARD CHIFFON CAKE

It's fruity, it's sharp, it's warming and it's indulgent. This cake is basically everything I aim to be in this lifetime. And let's be real: for January, she's a total looker. We've got the bounciest, squishiest, boingiest, lighter than air, pillowy soft, melt in your mouth cardamom spiced chiffon sponge smothered in a velvety smooth whipped vanilla bean and custard mascarpone and topped with two types of rhubarb: one, a stem ginger and rhubarb compote and the other, a poached rhubarb drizzled with a vanilla and grenadine syrup.

Recipe Makes: 25 cm / 10 inch sponge

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POACHED

325 g Caster Sugar
250 ml Water
75 ml Grenadine Syrup
0.5 tsp Vanilla Bean Paste
625 g Forced Rhubarb

COMPOTE

230 g Forced Rhubarb,
20 g Caster Sugar
10 g Stem Ginger, diced
0.5 tbsp Stem Ginger Syrup
0.5 tsp Vanilla Bean Paste
1.5 tbsp Grenadine Syrup
½ tsp Cornflour, sifted

SPONGE

6 Large Eggs, separated
265 g Caster Sugar
85 ml Vegetable Oil
55 ml Whole Milk
1 tsp Vanilla Bean Paste
150 g '00'/AP/Plain Flour*
50 g Potato Starch*
1 tsp Baking Powder*
Pinch of Salt
7 Cardamom Pods, ground
1 tsp Cream of Tartar*

CUSTARD CREAM

250 g Mascarpone
60 g Custard Powder*
35 g Icing Sugar*
1 tsp Vanilla Bean Paste
450 ml Double Cream

*sifted

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- First up, let's get that **rhubarb poached** and rested as this will need to be done 24 hours ahead of when you are ready to use.

- Slice your rhubarb into 5 to 10 cm batons and leave to one side. Add the remaining ingredients to a large pan and bring to a boil. Add the rhubarb to the pan and then immediately remove from the heat.

- Transfer the syrup and the rhubarb to a large tray and cover with clingfilm/saran wrap. Once the syrup has cooled, pop the tray into the fridge and leave to sit for 24 hours. NOTE: this is to achieve that cerise pink rhubarb.

- For the **compote**, add all the ingredients to a saucepan and place over a medium heat. Gently cook the rhubarb for about 15 to 20 minutes, stirring often.

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- You're wanting the rhubarb to be mostly broken down before you sift in the cornflour, so wait until it becomes stringy and saucy, add the cornflour, give it a good mix to dissolve and leave to cook for another minute or two before taking off the heat.
- Transfer the compote to a large shallow tray and leave to completely cool. NOTE: if you think it looks too watery, it will thicken whilst cooling so do not add any more cornflour.
- For the **sponge**, preheat the oven to 150°C Fan/170°C/335°F/Gas Mark 3 and grab yourself a 10 inch / 25 cm angel cake tin/chiffon cake tin (you know the one with the tube in the middle and the prongs/feet at the top).
- You'll need three big mixing bowls – into one, add: egg yolks, 130 g caster sugar, vegetable oil, milk and vanilla bean paste. Use the paddle attachment for your stand mixer (or just use the whisk attachment for an electric hand mixer) and start at a slow speed to combine everything together. Once combined, mix on high for at least 10 minutes until the yolks have thickened, are paler in colour and the volume has doubled.
- Into a second mixing bowl, add: flour, potato starch, baking powder and a pinch of salt. Use a balloon whisk to mix everything together before sifting in 1/3 of the flour and the ground cardamom to the egg yolks. Use a rubber spatula to fold through. Once you are left with little to no visible flour streaks, add the next 1/3 and repeat the folding until all flour is added.
- Use the rubber spatula to scrape down the sides of the bowl and the bottom to ensure there are no flour pockets lurking. Leave to one side.
- Into your final mixing bowl, add: egg whites and cream of tartar. Using the whisk attachment, mix the whites on a medium to high speed until they begin to foam and stiffen. Start to add the remaining sugar whilst mixing in stages. Go little and often to ensure the sugar dissolves before adding more.
- Once all the sugar is added, allow the mixer to continue for a few minutes until you are left with a glossy, stiff meringue. Add 1/3 of the whisked egg whites to the egg yolk bowl and mix well to combine. Don't stress about being all nicey nice and gentle here – you are introducing a portion of the whites to loosen the yolks.
- Add half of the remaining whipped whites to the bowl and gently fold through. You want to be left with a smooth, well combined mix before adding the remaining whites. Fold through again.
- Grab your cake tin and lightly spray the base and sides with some water to prevent the sponge from sticking too much. DO NOT GREASE OR LINE YOUR TIN OKAY. Transfer the cake batter to the tin and use the back of a spoon to evenly distribute.
- Pop in the oven and bake for 40 minutes. Check for doneness (toothpick test or a bouncy, returnable top) before removing from the oven.

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- Immediately turn the cake upside down (trust in this) and place a cold tea towel over the top of the tin to help cool down the sponge. Once the towel is warm, rinse and repeat until the tin is cool to touch. Doing this will prevent the cake from going saggy and deflating. Leave to completely cool.

- Once the cake is cool, make the **whipped custard mascarpone** by adding the mascarpone, custard powder, icing sugar and vanilla bean to a mixing bowl. Use the whisk attachment to mix until smooth.

- Pour in the double cream and mix again until you reach medium peak. My advice would be to mix the rest by hand to ensure you don't overwork the cream. If you do and it becomes too stiff, add more double cream to loosen.

- Use half of the cream to crumb coat your sponge. Pop in the fridge and leave to set for 30 minutes.

- Use the second half of the cream to smooth over and decorate as you wish. Pop back in the fridge to set for 30 minutes.

- Gently spoon on top the cooled rhubarb compote. Don't go crazy here, use any leftover compote to serve alongside a slice of cake.

- Slice your rhubarb batons however you wish (I was mad and sliced them at a 45-degree angle to tessellate but also, I have no life so save yourself the hardship) and carefully place on top of the compote. Pop back in the fridge until serving.