

LEMON MERINGUE LOAF CAKE

Is it a loaf cake or just a loaf? Whatever it is, one thing I know for damn certain is how delicious this number is. This recipe has been tested countless times, which include a whole lotta fails but just means it's now nothing short of perfection. It's made up of a delightfully moist, not too sweet, sherbety lemon sponge, drowning in a lemon curd drizzle and topped with a lightly torched vanilla bean swiss meringue.

Recipe Serves: 6

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SPONGE

175g Caster Sugar
3 Large Lemons, zest only
160 g Unsalted Butter*
1.5 tsp Vanilla Bean Paste
3 Large Eggs, room temp
50 ml Olive Oil
50 g Crème Fraiche*
30 ml Lemon Juice, fresh
115 g Ground Almonds
130 g Plain/AP Flour**
2.5 tsp Baking Powder**

DRIZZLE

60 g Icing Sugar**
30 g Caster Sugar
2 Lemons, juice only
15 ml Water
35 g Lemon Curd, plus extra

MERINGUE

125 ml Egg White
255 g Caster Sugar
1 tsp Vanilla Bean Paste

*room temp
**sifted

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Preheat oven to 150°C Fan/170°C/340°F/Gas Mark 3 and grease and line a 2 lb deep loaf tin.

Add the lemon zest to sugar and mix with your fingertips to release the oil from the zest. Add to a bowl.

Add the butter to the sugar and cream together for 5 minutes until light and fluffy. Add the eggs one by one, mixing well between each addition.

Don't stress if it looks a little curdled, we will sort that out in the next few steps. Add the crème fraiche, oil and lemon juice to the bowl and mix.

Add the ground almonds, flour and baking powder to the bowl and mix on a medium speed until everything has just combined. Scoop the batter into the lined tin and level out with the back of a spoon.

A nifty tip here is to pipe a thin line of butter in the middle to control where the sponge cracks for that nice flat top. Pop the tin into the oven for 60 minutes or until the sponge is baked through.

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Leave the sponge to sit in the tin whilst you mix all the ingredients for the drizzle in a bowl.

After 10 mins, carefully pour $\frac{1}{4}$ of the drizzle on top of the sponge and brush over with a pastry brush. Leave to sit for 5 minutes before repeating with another $\frac{1}{4}$ of the drizzle. Allow the sponge to cool in the tin.

Once the sponge is completely cool, transfer to a cooling rack with a tray underneath. Use a pastry brush to brush over the remaining drizzle on top and on the sides.

Finish by smothering one last layer of lemon curd all over before wrapping the sponge tightly in clingfilm and pop in the fridge for a few hours or overnight.

Make the meringue by adding sugar and egg whites to a bowl. Mix on a low speed for a few minutes to combine and begin dissolving the sugar. Place the bowl over a pan of simmering water and cook the mixture to at least $67^{\circ}\text{C}/152^{\circ}\text{F}$ for a stiff meringue.

Make sure you continue to whisk this every so often to avoid the sugar crystallising on the sides or overcooking the bottom.

Add the bowl to stand mixer and whisk on a high speed till the bowl is cool to touch on the outside and the meringue is at stiff peak. Alternatively, you can use an electric hand whisk – it will just take a while longer.

Pipe the meringue on top of the cooled loaf, smush around with the back of a spoon and lightly brown with a blow torch. You could do this under a hot grill but I haven't done this because I am not brave enough SO PLEASE PROCEED WITH CAUTION.