

## Crêpe Cake with Roasted Apples, Pastry Cream Mousseline and Cider Sauce

**Time:** about an hour

You might experience a wave of cognitive dissonance when comparing our glowing predilection for plain hot, sugared crêpes in the previous recipe with the lofty visuals of this ensemble. Yes, the two could not appear to be more different. They do, however, share one important similarity: the appeal of eating crêpe-on-crêpe. In our opinion, crêpes are best consumed pleated or stacked upon themselves in tender, supple folds without a lot of interruption from things un-crêpe-like—such as surging waves of fruit, chocolate sauce, or cream. The configuration above possesses fruit, yes, but its apple slices are paper-thin and roasted until soft; it possesses cream, yes, but an ethereal blend of pastry and chantilly cream, and minimal amounts between each crêpe—just enough to offer a gorgeous bit of gilding. It is the crêpes themselves that make this dessert so brilliant—and they maintain their unique presence and resilience throughout.

A dinner party masterstroke, this cake is beautiful to gaze upon, light on the stomach, heavenly on the palate, and ready to slice without last minute heating, beating or garnishing fracas (more on slicing in Baking Remarks). It fairly bursts with the flavors of Normandy in the crisp-to-chiffon crêpes and elegant cream, vividly tart roasted apple rings and bright cider syrup.

Think it looks difficult to make? Think again. If you can make a crêpe, you can make this cake

### Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe you will need a medium saucepan; a small saucepan; a fine conical sieve; a whisk; a rubber spatula; a peeler; an apple corer; a mandoline slicer; aluminum foil; parchment paper; an 8 x 2-inch entremet ring mold or an 8-inch cake pan; an 8-inch cardboard round (homemade or store bought); a small offset spatula; a long metal spatula; and a butane torch (one from the hardware or one from the cooking store).

### Ingredients

*for the crêpes*

14 finished crêpes from the Plain Sugared Crêpes Recipe, just made, unsugared and

### Baking Remarks

A mandoline, the formerly scary French slicing contraption, is an essential piece of equipment for pitch-perfect apple or potato slices. Improvements in their design have made mandolines easier and safer to use since we shaved our fingers to the bone years ago. The ones with v-shaped blades best are generally considered the best.

We've simply got to tell you how tremendous a pastry ring is for an assembly of this sort. It has no bottom, so you don't have to invert the cake and shake it loose—you just twist and lift! It holds the layers in perfect symmetry. (It also makes a wonderfully handsome quiche with high, straight sides and a bottom crust that browns directly through parchment on a stone.) Often called an entremet ring, we got ours (8-inch by 1 3/8-inch) at JB Prince for \$15.

<http://www.jbprince.com/>

Another thing you'll need to make this recipe is a cardboard round, which enables the cake to be lifted and transferred worry-free. Slip a long metal spatula under the round and slide the cake to the palm of your hand. At this point you can take it anywhere—even dancing. Cake rounds are available in pastry supply stores, real and online, and are a very easy do-it-yourselfer.

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stacked in two columns on a sheet pan

## *for the pastry cream*

4 large egg yolks

1 cup (8 ounces) half and half

.38 ounces sifted Anson Mills Fine Cloth Bolted Pastry Flour (about 1 ½ sifted tablespoons)

Pinch fine sea salt

4 tablespoons (1.75 ounces) granulated sugar

1 tablespoon unsalted European-style butter

¾ teaspoon vanilla extract

1/3 cup (2.6 ounces) heavy cream, lightly whipped

## *for the cider syrup*

16 ounces apple cider

¼ cinnamon stick

## *for the apples*

4 tablespoons juice from two large, juicy lemons

1 ½ pounds tart, relatively firm apples such as Gravenstein, Cortland, Pippin, Winesap, or Paula Red

2 tablespoons melted butter

Granulated sugar

## *for cooking the crêpes*

3 tablespoons (1 ½ ounces) European-style unsalted butter

Trace the diameter of the pan on a sheet of cardboard and snip. Voilà.

The cake round also provides a mercy cushion between the slicing knife and your china. And while we're on the subject of slicing, it's time to put in a pitch for the electric knife: scorn of decades past, the thing that wounded our romantic soul most poignantly when our father plugged one into the dining room wall socket to carve the Christmas roast, demanding "Turn up the lights!" the electric knife is now a member in good standing of our *batterie de cuisine*. Nothing, but nothing cuts through alternate layers of soft, solid and slippery like an electric knife. It doesn't drag its feet, it doesn't lurch off-course, it simply gets the job done. Typically maul your smoked salmon and cucumber finger sandwiches? Not anymore. Anyone who makes layered desserts or hors d'oeuvres needs one of these.

We don't, however, recommend them for carving holiday roasts.

Then there is the butane torch. Flame is essential for producing the impossibly crisp caramel shell on the top of the cake. It's not a step you'll want to forego. Sure, you can buy a twee little crème brûlée torch for a lot of bucks, but we prefer our big ACE hardware classic—it never runs out of juice—and we feel like such a *guy* when we use it.

*for glazing the cake*

1½ tablespoons granulated sugar—preferably superfine

## Directions

1. *Make the pastry cream:* Set a fine conical sieve over a deep, narrow bowl. In another bowl combine the egg yolks and 1 tablespoon of the half-and-half, and whisk well. Add the sifted flour and whisk vigorously until the mixture is satiny smooth and free of lumps. Heat the remaining half and half, the sugar, and salt in a small, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-high heat until simmering, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon to dissolve the sugar. As soon as the mixture reaches a simmer, pull the saucepan off the burner and drizzle its contents slowly into the yolks, whisking constantly, until the saucepan is empty. Reduce the heat to medium-low, return the saucepan to the burner, and pour the warm yolk mixture back into the saucepan all at once, scraping the bowl with a rubber spatula and whisking the cream vigorously. Whisk the cream until it thickens and bubbles burst on the surface, 20 to 30 seconds. Allow it to bubble for 10 seconds. (Unlike crème anglaise, pastry cream is supposed to boil.) The cream should be thick and glossy.

2. Remove the pan from the heat and pour the pastry cream through the strainer, scraping the saucepan with a rubber spatula. Knock the cream through the mesh by tapping the rim of the strainer with the handle of a wooden spoon. Whisk in the cold butter and vanilla. Press plastic wrap directly against the surface of the cream and refrigerate until cold, about 4 hours, or overnight.

3. *Make the cider syrup:* Set the cider and a small piece of stick cinnamon in a medium saucepan and reduce it over low heat until syrupy, about 25 minutes. Remove the cinnamon, transfer the syrup to a small pitcher, and cool to room temperature. There will be about ¾ cup. Set it aside until ready to use. (The syrup may be made ahead and refrigerated, but is best served at room temperature.)

4. *Roast the apples:* Adjust an oven rack to the highest position and turn on the broiler. Line 2 or 3 sheet pans (depending on how many you have) with aluminum foil and brush them with melted butter. Have the lemon juice nearby in one small bowl and about half a cup of sugar nearby in another. Peel and core the apples one at a time and toss them in lemon juice. Set up the mandoline for slicing, and slice the apples on the second thinnest setting or about 1/16-inch thin. Lay them in a single layer on one of the buttered sheet pans, 20 slices per pan. Sprinkle the apples with sugar. Broil 2 to 2 ½ minutes, rotating the sheet pan halfway through, until the apples are soft, spotty brown, and fragrant. Remove the tray from the broiler and use a spatula to transfer the apple slices immediately to a fresh sheet of aluminum foil or

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parchment (otherwise they become glued to the foil as they cool).

5. Just before beginning the crêpe cake assembly, fold the lightly beaten whipped cream into the chilled pastry cream. The cream will be light and airy. Set it aside.

6. *Build the crêpe cake:* Lay a sheet of parchment on a sheet pan and place a 8-inch cardboard cake round fitted with a 8-inch ring mold on the paper. If you are using a cake pan, choose one of the same diameter, spray it lightly with vegetable oil and lay a cut parchment round into the bottom of the pan. Trim any straggly or over-sized crêpes with scissors. Place a crêpe in the bottom of the ring or pan and spread a thin layer of cream over it with a small offset spatula. (**Note:** if you are using a cake pan, make sure to lay the first crêpe lacy side down as it will ultimately be the top layer of the cake.) Lay a second crêpe on top. Spread the second crêpe with a thin layer of cream, then arrange a layer of apple slices on the cream. Repeat this pattern, spreading pastry cream between every crêpe layer and arranging apple slices between every other. Ultimately there should be 6 layers of apple slices. The top two layers of the cake should be crêpes and pastry cream only.

7. *Serve the cake:* If you used a ring, twist it slightly and then lift it off the cake. If you used a cake pan, run a metal spatula around the pan's circumference and lay a cardboard round on the top. Invert the pan and unmold the cake. Lift off the parchment round. Sprinkle the sugar over the top of the cake and caramelize it by running a torch lightly over the surface. You may hold the cake at cool room temperature for up to 4 hours under a cake dome before serving. Refrigeration does not enhance its delicate nature. To serve, cut the cake into 8 to 10 pieces with a electric or serrated knife. Drizzle with cider syrup.

**Makes 1 8-inch cake; serves 8 to 10**