

Salt and Serenity

Brown Butter and Salted Caramel Crunch Cake

You will need a stand mixer, a candy thermometer, an offset spatula and a 9 inch cardboard cake circle. A cake turntable (revolving rotating cake decorating stand) would also be helpful.

Read the recipe thoroughly before starting to bake!

Serves 12

This is my adaptation of Allyson Bobbitt and Sarah Belle's Salted **Caramel Toffee Cake** from their stunning new book, *"Bobbette and Belle"*.

Three layers of brown butter vanilla cake and two layers of almond meringue are sandwiched together with salted caramel buttercream. The finished cake gets a generous drizzle of salted caramel sauce and if you're feeling really decadent, an optional garnish of English Toffee shards. Trader Joe's makes an excellent English toffee and if you are Canadian, Laura Secord's Buttercrunch would be a fine choice.

There are several components to this cake. Plan on 2 days to make the cake. Day one to make all the parts and day two to assemble.

Brown Butter Cake:

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups unsalted butter
4 cups all-purpose flour
4 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon fine sea salt
4 large eggs, room temperature
2 large egg whites, room temperature
2 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup sugar
1 Tablespoon vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste
2 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups whole milk, room temperature

Salted Caramel Sauce: (recipe from Stella Park at serious Eats)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup water
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Diamond Crystal kosher salt
1 cup 35% cream
1 teaspoon vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste

Almond Meringues: (recipe from Rose Levy Berenbaum's The Cake Bible)

4 ounces almond flour (I like Bob's Redmill brand)

1 ½ tablespoons cornstarch

½ cup plus 1 tablespoon superfine sugar

¾ cup icing sugar (lightly spooned into cup)

4 large egg whites

½ teaspoon cream of tartar

Salted Caramel Buttercream:

8 large egg whites

2 cups sugar

2 pounds unsalted butter

2 teaspoons vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste

1 teaspoon Diamond Crystal Kosher salt

½ cup salted caramel sauce (recipe above)

4 ounces English Toffee (optional), for garnish.

Make cake:

1. Heat butter in a heavy-bottomed and preferably light-colored saucepan over low heat, stirring occasionally, until melted. Continue cooking, stirring with a rubber spatula frequently, until foaming subsides and butter starts to smell nutty and milk solids are a deep golden brown, about 5-7 minutes. Pour the butter into a heatproof bowl, scraping the milk solids off the bottom of the pan.
2. Allow the butter to cool to room temperature, stirring it every now and then with a rubber spatula, then place it in the refrigerator until cold about 30 minutes. It is crucial that the butter is chilled until solid. Once cold, re-soften the butter at room temperature for 30 minutes.
3. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease three 9-inch round cake pans with butter and line the bottom of each pan with parchment paper.
4. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder and salt. In a separate bowl, whisk together eggs and egg whites.
5. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the room temperature brown butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add eggs, in 3 additions, mixing well after each addition. Stop mixer to scrape down sides of bowl.
6. Turn mixer on low speed and alternate adding the flour mixture in 3 additions and milk in 2 additions, beginning and ending with the flour

mixture. Blend after each addition until just combined, stopping the mixer to scrape down the sides of the bowl at least once. Divide the batter evenly between the 3 pans using a rubber spatula to spread it to the edges.

7. Bake for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. For even baking, rotate pans front to back, halfway through baking time. Allow cakes to cool in pans for 10 minutes before turning them out onto a wire rack to cool completely.

Make Caramel Sauce:

8. In a 3-quart stainless steel saucier, combine water, sugar, and salt over medium heat. Stir with a fork until syrup comes to a boil, about 4 minutes, then simmer without stirring until syrup is honey-colored, roughly 6 minutes, shaking and swirling as needed to ensure even caramelization. Continue cooking until syrup is light to medium amber, a minute more. Immediately add cream and reduce heat to medium-low.
9. Stirring constantly with a heat-resistant spatula to knock back the foam, simmer until caramel registers 225°F on a digital thermometer, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a heat-resistant container, stir in vanilla extract and cool to room temperature. Caramel will be runny while warm, but thicken as it cools, turning just a little chewy when cold. Refrigerate up to 1 month in an airtight container.

Make Meringue Layers:

10. Line 2 heavy baking sheets with foil (do not use parchment, the meringue will stick to it). Using a skewer or toothpick, trace a 9 inch circle onto the foil, to use as your guide, so that you get a circle the same size as the cake layers.
11. Preheat oven to 200°F. In the food processor, pulse the almond flour, cornstarch, half the superfine sugar (1/4 cup), and all the icing sugar a few times to thoroughly combine. Set aside in a small bowl.
12. In the bowl of a stand mixer, fitted with the whisk attachment, beat egg whites until frothy. Add cream of tartar and beat at medium speed while gradually adding 1 Tablespoon superfine sugar. When soft peaks form when beater is raised, gradually add the remaining ¼ cup superfine sugar and beat at high speed until stiff peaks form when beater is raised.
13. Fold in reserved almond flour mixture using a large spatula. Fill a disposable pastry bag with half the meringue. Cut the tip off the bag to give you a 1-inch diameter opening. Pipe meringue, beginning at outer

edge of circle and work your way towards the center. You can also just spoon meringue into the circle and spread it out with an offset spatula.

14. Bake the circles for 2 hours, until dry, but not beginning to colour. To test for doneness, dig out a small amount of the meringue from the center with the tip of a paring knife. It should only be very slightly sticky. If it is still quite wet, continue baking for 15 more minutes and test again. Set meringues onto wire racks to cool completely. When completely cool, turn foil sheet upside down, so meringue is sitting flat on countertop, gently peel foil off meringue. If meringue breaks, don't worry. The meringue layers will be buried under buttercream in the center of the cake. No one will know.

Make Salted Caramel Buttercream:

15. In a medium saucepan, bring an inch or two of water to a simmer. Place egg whites and sugar in a large stainless steel mixing bowl. Place over simmering water and whisk gently until mixture registers 140°F on a candy or instant read thermometer. Immediately pour egg white mixture into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment.
16. Whisk on medium high speed until the egg whites have doubled in volume, hold medium peaks and have cooled to room temperature, about 10-12 minutes. The best way to gauge this by putting the inside of your wrist to the outside of the bowl. It's more accurate than your hands. Switch from the whisk to the paddle attachment.
17. Turn the mixer to medium low speed and slowly add butter, a few cubes at a time, increasing the speed to medium high after each addition and beating until the butter is fully incorporated before adding more. Resist the temptation to dump all the butter in at once. Be patient. Once all the butter has been added, continue to beat on medium-high until buttercream is light and fluffy, 1-2 minutes. Stop mixer and scrape down sides and bottom of bowl. Add vanilla extract and salt and beat at medium speed for an additional 2 minutes.
18. With the mixer on medium speed, add ½ cup of salted caramel sauce in a slow steady stream until fully combined. Stop to scrape down sides of bowl, then beat for 2 more minutes. Buttercream is ready to use immediately or can be stored in an airtight container in fridge for 1 week or freezer for 3 months. Bring to room temperature before using.

Assemble cake:

19. Place cardboard cake circle on revolving cake stand. Put a dollop of buttercream on the cardboard circle. Top with first layer of cake, bottom side down. Cover with thin layer of buttercream. Top with first layer of almond meringue. Cover with thin layer of buttercream. Top with second layer of cake, bottom side up. Cover with thin layer of buttercream. Top with second layer of almond meringue. Cover with thin layer of buttercream. Top with third layer of cake, bottom side up.

20. Cover sides and top of cake with a very thin layer of buttercream. This is your "crumb" layer. Some cake may peek through, that's ok. Chill cake for 30 minutes. Spread a thick layer of buttercream on sides and top of cake. Using the clean edge of your offset spatula or a wide plastic cake smoother, smooth the sides and top of the cake.

21. Pour about ½ cup of reserved salted caramel sauce (it should be room temperature) over the top of the cake. Use your offset spatula to encourage it to drip over sides of cake. Decorate rim of top of cake with English toffee if desired. Cake will keep in the fridge for 2 days. Let come to room temperature before serving. Any leftover cake can be sliced. Wrap individual slices in plastic wrap and store in Ziploc bag in freezer for up to 3 months.