

Salt and Serenity

Ombré Blackberry Cake

Makes one 6" round cake (3 layers). You will need three 6 inch cake pans, a 6 inch cardboard cake circle, candy thermometer and an offset spatula. A revolving cake decorating stand would be helpful. I highly recommend using [cake strips](#) when baking these cakes. They result in cakes that are moist and perfectly level, without cracks or crusty edges.

This is a very pretty celebration cake. The buttercream is tinted naturally, using pureed and strained fresh blackberries as well as freeze-dried blackberries. The freeze-dried ones were purchased online from [nuts.com](#). I liked the colours I got using a combination of the two forms of blackberries, but it would still work if you could not get the freeze-dried ones.

Since the cake batter and buttercream both use only egg whites, I used egg whites in the carton. It saves having to separate eggs and there are no leftover yolks.

The recipe makes more buttercream than you will likely need. Any leftover will keep in the freezer for several months. It would be delicious on cupcakes.

White cake recipe very slightly adapted from America's Test Kitchen book, *"The Perfect Cake."*

Cake:

- 1 cup whole milk, at room temperature
- 210 grams egg whites, (from about 6 large eggs), at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 255 grams (2¼ cups) cake flour
- 374 grams (1¾ cups) granulated sugar
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 16 grams (4 teaspoons) baking powder
- 5 grams (1 teaspoon) kosher salt
- 170 grams unsalted butter (1½ sticks), cut into 12 pieces, room temperature

Blackberry Buttercream:

- 340 grams (2 pints) blackberries
- 25 grams (2 Tablespoons) sugar
- 8 grams (2 Tablespoons) lemon juice
- 28 grams (1¼ cups) freeze dried blackberries*
- 284 grams egg whites, room temperature
- 284 grams white sugar
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 908 grams unsalted butter, cut into 2" chunks and softened at room temperature for 30 minutes
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste

Assembly:

- 340 grams (2 pints) blackberries
- Edible flowers
- Mint leaves

1. **Make cake:** Set oven rack in middle position. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray three 6-inch round cake pans with non-stick cooking spray; line the bottoms with parchment paper rounds. Spray the paper. If using cake strips, wet cake strips and wrap them around the outside of each cake pan.

2. Using a stand mixer, fitted with the paddle attachment, mix cake flour, sugar, lemon zest, baking powder, and salt in on low speed, until combined. Add butter, one piece at a time, and continue mixing until butter is broken down into pea sized pieces, about 1 minute.
3. Add all but ½ cup of milk mixture to mixer and beat at medium-high speed for 1½ minutes. Add remaining ½ cup of milk mixture and beat 30 seconds more. Stop mixer and scrape sides of bowl. Return mixer to medium-low speed and beat 20 seconds longer. Divide batter evenly between three prepared cake pans; using an off-set spatula, spread batter to pan walls and smooth tops. Arrange pans at least 3 inches from the oven walls and 2 inches apart.
4. Bake until thin skewer or toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 27-30 minutes. Let cakes rest in pans for 3 minutes. Loosen from sides of pans with a knife, if necessary, and invert onto wire racks. Reinvert onto additional wire racks. Let cool completely, about 1½ hours.
5. Place 340 grams blackberries, 25 grams sugar and 8 grams lemon juice in medium saucepan. Using a fork or a potato masher, crush the blackberries. Cook mixture over medium heat for about 5 minutes until blackberries are broken down and slightly reduced. Strain mixture through a fine mesh sieve. Discard solids and set strained liquid in the fridge to chill.
6. Place freeze dried blackberries in a spice grinder or food processor and process until berries are a fine powder. Set powder aside.
7. **Make buttercream:** Combine the egg whites, sugar and salt together in the bowl of your stand mixer. Set the bowl over a pan of water and turn the heat on medium low. You don't need the water to even simmer, you just want it hot enough to steam, since steam is what actually heats the whites.
8. Whisk frequently to prevent an egg white omelet forming on the sides, but continual mixing isn't necessary. Aim to get the mixture to at least a 145°F for food safety reasons but, reaching 150°F would make for a nice margin of error. If your egg whites are at room temperature, this won't take very long, maybe just a few minutes. Whites straight from the fridge will take longer.
9. When the mixture is sufficiently hot, remove from the heat and use the whisk attachment to whip on medium high speed until the mixture has doubled in volume and turned snowy white. Continue whipping until the meringue is cool. Use your hands to feel the bowl itself, rather than simply testing the temperature of the meringue. You want it to feel perfectly cool to the touch with no trace of warmth. Note: if you are using a glass or ceramic bowl, even if the meringue has cooled, the bowl itself may still be quite warm and continue conducting heat into the buttercream over time. If you are using a glass or ceramic bowl, transfer the meringue to a new bowl before proceeding or continue mixing until the bowl itself is cool.
10. Replace whisk attachment with paddle attachment. Turn the mixer down to medium-low and begin adding in the butter, one chunk at a time. If you didn't let your meringue cool enough, this is when you'll really regret it. By the time you've added all the butter, you may need to scrape down the bowl to fully incorporate any butter or meringue that's stuck at the sides. At one point it will look like the buttercream has curdled, but just keep beating and it will come together. Add vanilla extract or paste.
11. Transfer about 1/3 of the buttercream into a large mixing bowl. Add 1 Tablespoon of chilled blackberry puree and 1 teaspoon of blackberry powder. Mix well. This will be your palest buttercream, to be used between the layers and to crumb coat the cake.

12. Divide the remaining 2/3 of buttercream into 4 medium sized bowls. Add 1 Tablespoon blackberry puree and 1 teaspoon freeze-dried blackberry powder to the first bowl. Mix well. Add 2 Tablespoons blackberry puree and 2 teaspoons powder to the second bowl. Mix well. Add 3 Tablespoons blackberry puree and 3 teaspoons powder to the third bowl. Mix well. Add 4 Tablespoons blackberry puree and 4 teaspoons powder to the fourth bowl. Mix well.
13. Wash 1½ pints of the fresh blackberries. Slice the blackberries in half, lengthwise. Lay the sliced berries, cut side down, on a paper towel lined baking sheet.
14. Put first cake layer onto a cardboard cake circle or plate with a little buttercream underneath so it doesn't slide. Put a bit of buttercream on the bottom of the cardboard cake circle and "glue it" to the cake turntable.
15. Using the very palest buttercream, pipe or spread some buttercream onto the layer of cake. Spread it to the edges of the layer. Cover buttercream with the sliced blackberries. Cover blackberries with a thin layer of buttercream. Repeat with the second layer and top with the third layer.
16. Cover the entire cake with a very thin layer of the palest buttercream. This will be your crumb coat. Refrigerate or freeze for 20 minutes until the buttercream has hardened.
17. Using a piping bag or small offset spatula, spread the darkest colour buttercream around the bottom of the cake. Work your way up the cake, piping or spreading the buttercream so that you get progressively lighter in colour as you move towards the top of the cake. Add a bit more of the palest buttercream to the top of the cake. Smooth the top of the cake. Using bench scraper or large offset spatula, go around the cake once, scraping the excess icing off the spatula. Continue to smooth out the sides and you should achieve the ombré effect. Fill in any holes or gaps with additional icing.
18. Decorate top of cake as desired, with additional whole blackberries and flowers and mint leaves, if using. I placed the leftover icing colours into piping bags fitted with star tips (Ateco #867 and #864) and piped a few stars in between the berries and flowers.