



Mystery Cake of 1932

This is one of the few old recipes that can be precisely dated: It was developed in 1932, during the worst of the Depression. In keeping with rather desperate circumstances of that time, it contains no eggs and very little butter. The rich, moist texture of the cake is most likely due to its use of tomato, a novel ingredient for a cake but perhaps not so surprising as it may seem—the tomato, after all, is technically a fruit.

From Jim Fobel's Old-Fashioned Baking Book by Jim Foble, Lake Isle Press, 1996

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
3/4 cup packed dark brown sugar
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
One 10 3/4-ounce can tomato soup
1 cup (6 ounces) raisins, chopped
1/2 cup (2 ounces) chopped walnuts
1 tablespoon confectioner's sugar, for topping

Makes one 11 3/4-by-7 1/2-inch cake

PREPARATION

1. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 350°F. Grease a 11 3/4-by-7 1/2-inch baking pan.
2. In a medium-sized bowl, stir together the flour, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves.
3. In another medium-sized bowl combine the brown sugar and butter; beat with an electric mixer until blended. Beat in the tomato soup until smooth. Stir in the raisins, walnuts, and the dry ingredients. Turn the batter into the prepared pan, smoothing the top. Bake about 30 minutes, until the top springs back when lightly touched and a toothpick inserted in the center emerges clean. Cool in the pan, on a rack.
4. If desired, arrange on top of the cake 1/2-inch-wide strips of paper set on the diagonal in two directions to make a lattice pattern. Place the confectioner's sugar in a small sieve and sift over the paper. Carefully remove paper to reveal stenciled design. Cut into squares and serve.