

LEMON CHEESECAKE BARS WITH STRAWBERRY GLAZE

INGREDIENTS

for the crust

1 1/4 cups famous wafer crumbs (or oreo crumbs, minus the filling)

4 tablespoons sugar

big pinch of salt

5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

for the cheesecake filling

20 oz. cream cheese, at room temperature

2 large eggs, at room temperature

1/2 cup sugar

1 teaspoon lemon extract

1 tablespoon finely grated lemon zest

4 tablespoons lemon juice

for the strawberry glaze and white decoration

1/2 c. seedless strawberry jam

1 cup powdered sugar

4 teaspoons milk

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 325F. Make a foil spring for your 8" square baking pan (or use a square spring form pan). If using a spring form pan, cover the outside with foil as well, as this will be baked in a water bath, and you don't want any leakage. Spray prepared pan with cooking spray.

For the crust, in a medium bowl, stir together the famous wafer crumbs, sugar, and salt. Add the melted butter and stir to completely combine. Press firmly and evenly into the prepared pan. Place pan in freezer to chill. Bake for 15 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool completely.

For the filling, in the bowl of a stand mixer, cream the cream cheese on medium-high speed until smooth and creamy, about 1 to 2 minutes. Add the eggs and sugar and beat on medium speed until just combined. Add the lemon extract, zest and juice, and beat again. Spread mixture evenly over the cooled crust and tap the pan gently on the counter to settle it in. place into a larger pan and fill with boiling water around the cheesecake. Bake for 55-60 minutes, or until cheesecake wobbles just slightly through the center, and the edges are just a bit golden. The edges will puff up when baking, and then settle back down once cooled. Remove from the oven and cool completely on a wire rack.

For the strawberry glaze, briskly stir the jam until it is very smooth. Then spread evenly onto top of cheesecake. There will be a small raised edge of cheesecake filling around the pan sides, which will get cut off if you want to achieve the perfect red tops on the squares. Don't spread jam onto the raised cheesecake edges. Place pan in refrigerator to cool completely, 4 hours or overnight. Once set, carefully remove the cheesecake from the pan by pulling up on the foil sling or loosening the spring form. Cut off the raised edges and then slice into squares, to desired size. To get clean cuts, dip knife into a warm glass of water and then wipe knife clean after each cut.

For the white decoration, stir together the powdered sugar and milk. You want it to be pretty thick. Place in pastry bag fitted with a small plain round tip. Pipe a heart shape -- or whatever shape you want, really - onto the center of each cheesecake bar. Once this white frosting has been piped onto the jam, it can be coaxed with a toothpick to perfect the shape.

Store refrigerated. Can be prepared the day prior to serving.