

Marcus Armstrong's Great-Grandmother's Red Velvet Cake



I'm Marcus Armstrong and, when I think of the holidays, one thing comes to mind – food. Thanksgiving and Christmas has always been a time when family came together to celebrate and eat the most amazing food imaginable. The centerpiece of every Thanksgiving dinner for us was the red velvet cake my great grandmother, Reba, would make. I'm not quite sure how she managed to do it, but the cake would be about half the size of her small kitchen room table. Standing there, crowded around her quaint kitchen space, the family would all marvel at its beauty and patiently wait until after dinner to dig in. The idea was to have a large enough cake for the entire family to share. Although when I was younger, it seemed downright impossible for such a large cake to come out of such a small oven.

When telling the story of this cake while growing up, most would just mark it off as any ordinary red velvet cake. Every grocery store within a country mile sells them, and we have all seen them. The truth is, this was not a standard issue cake, but quite special indeed. What made it so unique was the icing that she made to compliment the warmth of the cake. It was an icing she cooked on the stovetop, and while still slightly warm, would spread it on each cake before stacking the rest of the layers. As the years went on, sometimes the cake would slide around because the icing was too hot, but no one minded. Everyone was prepared to eat what they could and take the rest home in boxes.

A few years after my great grandmother passed, and after I really started to get serious about baking, I decided to take up the mantle of making this holiday tradition. My family gets together every Christmas Eve, and I was tasked with making this cake for everyone to enjoy. With my baking skills progressing, I have charged myself with taking this cake a step further and giving it a bit of holiday flair. While I continue to use her icing, I have decided to use it as a filling and decorate the outside of the cake with my special Swiss buttercream. I make sure to bring leftover filling so my family can pour it generously over their slices. It continues to keep her memory alive with us each holiday season.

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Cake Ingredients

4 Eggs
1 cup Vegetable Oil
4 tbsp Cocoa
2 cups Buttermilk
2 tbsp Vinegar
3 cups Sugar
1 oz. Red Food Coloring
2 tsp Vanilla Extract
5 cups White Lily Self-Rising Flour
2 tsp Baking Soda

Instructions:

1. Heat oven to 350°F. Grease and Flour 2 9-inch round cake pans. Set aside.
2. In a bowl, whisk flour, baking soda, and cocoa powder.
3. In a large bowl, combine the sugar and vegetable oil. Mix in the eggs, buttermilk, vanilla, and red food coloring until combined. Beat well.
4. Combine the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients just until combined.
5. Pour the batter about 2/3 full, evenly. Any leftover batter can be used for a few cupcakes or smaller cake.
6. Bake approximately 28-30 minutes, checking with a toothpick. When clean, set aside to cool.

Reba's Icing Ingredients:

2 cups Sugar
2 cups Evaporated Milk
10 heaping tablespoons All Purpose Flour
2 tsp Vanilla Extract
1 cup Butter or Margarine

Icing Instructions:

1. Mix sugar, flour, and evaporated milk to medium pot on stove. Add Vanilla and Butter.
2. Cook over medium heat until thick, stirring constantly.

3. Set aside to cool for a while, then beat with a mixer until smooth. (Add in a small amount of red food coloring to add color. Adjust for color preference.)
4. If using as icing for entire cake, put on while still slightly warm for ease in spreading.
5. If using as filling only, place in piping bag when cool and use with your favorite vanilla or cream cheese buttercream.

Assembly:

1. Level cakes with serrated knife or cake leveling tool.
2. If using Reba's icing for entire cake, spread on while icing is still slightly warm. Spread on first layer, then place second layer on top face down.
3. Spread remaining icing on the top and side of the cake.
4. Serve.
5. If using Reba's icing for filling, follow step 1. Then, using your favorite vanilla or cream cheese buttercream, pipe a dam along the outer edge of the first cake layer.
6. Pipe Reba's icing in the middle about the thickness of the dam.
7. Place second layer face down.
8. Frost the outside of the cake with the buttercream.
9. You can crumble up the leftover cake from leveling and place on the sides of the cake, or leave plain.
10. Serve.