

**MAKING THE
QUINTESSENTIAL
TASTE OF MARDI
GRAS IN NEW
ORLEANS:**

THE KING CAKE

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THE LORE

Anyone from New Orleans will tell you that the food most synonymous with Mardi Gras is the King Cake. While good enough to have all year round, this treat is only served yearly during the Carnival season from January 6th through Fat Tuesday / Mardi Gras Day.

Why January 6th? Well, that date is also known as Kings Day, the Epiphany or 12th Night; and, it marks the end of the Christmas season and start of Carnival in New Orleans.

The cake is much like a cinnamon roll topped with the colors of Mardi Gras, purple (justice), green (faith) and gold (power). And, it's served with a trinket inside. Most often it's a small plastic baby (like a baby Jesus figurine) but it can be a bean of your choice when making it at home.

The significance of the baby inside for the people lucky enough to enjoy one of these king cakes is any of the following: (a) the person, who finds it in their piece, gets to buy the next cake, (b) the baby brings them luck or (c) they are the king or queen for the day. Usually, if the children in the house get the baby, it's passed off as a sign of good luck. If one of the adults gets it, they're tagged with buying the next king cake (and quickly before the season ends and you have to wait a whole year).

Family Story

My grandmother, Grand Mere, told us stories of Mardi Gras when she was a young girl. One story sticks out in particular. She said that during Carnival Time, as they called Mardi Gras in her day, her family would throw parties for the children with two king cakes. One cake was for the boys and one for the girls. The children, who found the baby in their piece of cake, were made king and queen of the party, as in king and queen of the Carnival.

MAKING THE CAKE:

INGREDIENTS

The Cake:

- 1/2 cup of warm water (be sure it is no hotter than 115 F, ideally between 105 & 115)
- 2 packages dry yeast
- 2 teaspoons of sugar
- 4 cups flour (125 grams each)
- Up to 1 cup more of flour to a cup more for surface and kneading
- 1/2 cup of white, granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons of salt
- 1.5 teaspoons of ground nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon of grated lemon rind (reserve the lemon itself for the juice in the glaze below)
- 1/2 cup of warm milk and/or cream (cream is better)
- 1/2 cup of melted unsalted butter (one stick is usually 1/2 cup)
- 3 tablespoons of butter kept separate from the half cup, melted
- 5 egg yolks (large eggs)
- 1 plastic king cake baby (or a dried kidney bean will suffice)
- 1/2 cup of brown sugar or light brown sugar (your preference)
- 2 tablespoons of cinnamon

The Glaze:

- 2 cups of powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons of lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons of water

The Icing:

- 4 cups of powdered sugar
- 1 tablespoon of almond extract
- 2 tablespoons of vanilla extract
- 3-4 tablespoons of water
- 4 tablespoons of butter
- Food coloring (this is to color the icing purple, green & gold/yellow; mix red and blue to make purple)

MAKING THE CAKE:

PROCEDURE

The Cake:

- Pre-heat your oven to 350F.
- Heat the water and measure to 1/2 cup ; check temp and add the sugar then the yeast; set aside in a warm spot. . . Watch it bubble up {it's ALIVE}.
- In a large bowl, mix up the flour, salt, sugar, nutmeg, lemon rind
- Add the milk, butter, yeast and egg yolk.
- Mix thoroughly.
- Toss a handful of flour on the counter and drop the dough onto the floury surface.
- Get flour all over your hands and start patting the dough, turning it on itself to knead it. . . Add flour to the surface and your hands as necessary to prevent the dough from sticking to either one.
- The dough should be soft and resilient to the touch (i.e., poke it with a finger and watch it bounce back to its original shape).
- Set the dough aside for about 15-20 minutes covered with plastic wrap to prevent it from drying out. This time is needed to relax the gluten and allow you to subsequently roll the dough out without it recoiling.
- Roll out the dough with a rolling pin to about a half an inch or so thick.
- Coat with the extra melted butter, add a layer of brown sugar and cinnamon. . . Use your hands to spread it evenly over the full surface of the dough.
- Fold the dough in half on itself so that the layer of cinnamon and brown sugar is completely sandwiched in on the inside.
- Roll the dough to approximately 1 inch thick.
- Cut it into 3 strips long ways (pizza cutter is ideal for this).
- Start to braid it (it helps to braid the entire piece . . .then, to go back to the top of the braid and re-braid the start again, as the braid will be looser at the top than the end)
- Move your dough onto a baking sheet (e.g., piece of foil rubbed with butter or sprayed with something to prevent sticking).
- Loop each end together and make a big round circle of your dough on the baking sheet. It should look like a large doughnut or bagel with a hole in the center. Insert a ramekin or something that is oven safe in the center to prevent the dough from closing in on itself. You want a hole in the center as it bakes.
- Bake for exactly 28 minutes. Remove the ramekin from the center as soon as the cake is removed from the oven.
- Let the cake cool.

MAKING THE CAKE:

PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

The Glaze:

- In a medium sized bowl, mix all of the ingredients and agitate with a fork
- Add more powdered sugar if too running or a few drops of water if too dry

The Icing:

- Mix everything in a medium sized bowl to thick, adding more powdered sugar if necessary to sufficiently have a thick, white paste
- Separate the sugary mix into 3 bowls
- Color each with food coloring

MAKING THE CAKE: PROCESS SHOTS



Best thing you can do is to line up all of your ingredients and have them ready in their measured out portions before you start making the cake.



Toss every ingredient under the cake portion of the recipe into a large mixing bowl and mix. Using a spatula makes it easier to mix all ingredients and be sure you get everything from the sides of the bowl into the dough evenly.



Sprinkle flour onto the surface you will use to knead the dough. Be sure to cover your hands in flour. Flour prevents the dough from sticking to the surface you are working on and from sticking to your hands.



Cover with sprinklings of flower and start to knead in your hands.

MAKING THE CAKE:

PROCESS SHOTS (CONTINUED)



Knead, knead, knead. Pick up more flour and cover your hands and moist spots of dough, as necessary (to prevent it from sticking to your hands or the counter).



This is what the finished dough looks like. If you poke it with a finger, it bounces back in place.



Set aside in a warm spot and cover it with plastic wrap so that it doesn't dry out. Let it rest for about 15 to 20 minutes.



Roll out the dough to about half an inch thick.

MAKING THE CAKE:

PROCESS SHOTS (CONTINUED)



Paint a layer of butter onto the dough, using your hands if you need to evenly spread it out.



Spread a layer of brown sugar and cinnamon, using your hands if you need to evenly spread it out.



Fold the dough in half on top of itself so that the butter, brown sugar and cinnamon layer is on the inside.



Roll out the dough to about a half an inch or so thick.

MAKING THE CAKE:

PROCESS SHOTS (CONTINUED)



Cut 3 long strips. Pizza cutter is ideal but isn't necessary.



Start to braid the 3 strips. A how-to video can be seen [here](#).



This is the full braid from one end to the other.



Make it a circle by connecting the two ends. Be sure to put something oven safe in the center. This will prevent the center from closing during the bake.

MAKING THE CAKE:

PROCESS SHOTS (CONTINUED)



Paint a layer of butter just prior to baking. This will add moisture and make it taste even better.



Cook for 25- 30 minutes until the outer layer turns light brown.



Once the cake cools, drizzle glaze or paint it over the entire surface of the cake.



Add the colored icing and let dry. Once it's dry, cover it to retain the moisture.

REFERENCES

The references below provide sources of the contents of this compilation in chronological order of use in the document.

- Facts on the history of the King Cake:
 - <http://goneworleans.about.com/od/mardigras/a/Twelfth-Night.htm>
 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_cake
 - <http://www.kingcakes.com/lagniappe.php>

- Main source of the base ingredients for the cake:
 - <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/emeric-lagasse/king-cake-recipe/index.html>

- Watch this video and see how the cake is braided:
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guxDb84GFWI>