

Fresh Apple Cake with Crumb Topping

There are three things you should always have in your freezer: peas, ice, and crumb topping. I make big batches of these crumbs* and pull out handfuls whenever I need them. You should, too.

For this dessert, I started with Emily Luchetti's Fifty-Year Apple Cake in her wonderful cookbook, *A Passion for Desserts*. My goal was to shove as many apples in there as possible, so I took out the raisins and nuts and threw in more apples. And then more still. I left their skins on for texture and subbed in some brown sugar, which gave the cake a caramellike chew. If you make the crumb topping ahead, and store it in your freezer, this will be one of the simplest, no-need-for-a-mixer fresh apple cakes you'll ever make.

Makes 20 squares

2 eggs
1 cup granulated sugar
1 cup (packed) brown sugar
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 cup vegetable oil
4 small/medium Fuji apples (1-1/2 pounds total weight), or other variety you fancy, peels on, chopped (5-6 cups chopped apple)
2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup cold (or even frozen) crumb topping*
Powdered sugar, for sifting over (totally for show, totally optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease the sides and corners of a 9x13-inch rectangular cake pan and line the bottom with parchment.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk the eggs, two sugars, cinnamon, and oil. Fold in the apples. In a separate bowl, sift the flour, baking soda, and salt. Stir the dry ingredients into the wet, folding and mixing until all the white, floury bits are completely incorporated. The batter will be extremely thick. Carry on.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan, using a small offset spatula to work it into the corners. Sprinkle with the crumb topping.

Bake in the center of the oven for 45 minutes, until a skewer comes out clean. For neat slices, let cool for as long as you can stand it before cutting. If desired, sift over a little powdered sugar, but go easy -- the cake's plenty sweet. (I found cutting it with a metal bench scraper made the neatest squares. After 24 hours, store any leftover cake in the refrigerator.)

*To make crumb topping, stir together 1 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar, 1/2 cup granulated sugar, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1 1/2 tablespoons cinnamon. Stir in 1 cup (2 sticks) melted and warm unsalted butter. Fold in 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour until crumbly. Store in the freezer. (This topping appears in the cookbook *Baked Explorations* by Matt Lewis and Renato Poliafito.)