



pear upside down cake

Discover the delights of this complex concoction!

BY TRACY HANSEN BELLI PARK, QUEENSLAND

CALLING this concoction a ‘cake’ is a bit of an understatement (like calling chocolate ‘nice’ or Brad Pitt ‘presentable’). In reality, it’s as complex and caramel-y as a tarte tatin and as comforting and nostalgic as your Nanna’s steamed pud. Like anything understated though, when you discover just how good it really is, it’s a lovely surprise!

For the pear layer:

6 tablespoons butter (90g)
1&1/2 cup lightly packed (270g) dark brown sugar
6 ripe pears

For the cake layer:

12 tablespoons (180g) butter
1&1/4 cup (225g) sugar
1&1/2 teaspoon vanilla essence
3 large eggs
2&1/4 cups (315g) flour
2&1/4 teaspoon baking powder
3/4 cup (185ml) milk

NOTE: All ingredients need to be at room temperature.

Melt the butter in a 25cm (10in) diameter cast iron skillet or similar. Add the brown sugar and cook while stirring, until the sugar is melted and like fudge and the mix starts to bubble.

Remove from the heat and allow the pan to cool. While the pan is cooling preheat the oven to 190C (350F), measure out your cake ingredients, and prepare your pears.

The pears need to be peeled, cored and sliced into approx 10 similar-sized segments. Do not prepare your pears until needed as they start to go brown very quickly once they are peeled. Arrange the pear slices in a pattern on top of the cooled fudge sauce.

For the cake, cream together the butter and sugar until very light and fluffy. Add the vanilla, then add the eggs one at a time and beat really well between each addition. Sift the flour and baking powder into a separate bowl. Stir in half of the flour mix, then the milk, then the remaining flour. Do not over-mix during this final stage, just stir enough to ensure all the ingredients are incorporated.

Dollop the mixture evenly over the pear slices, then smooth lightly with a spatula or knife to obtain an even layer. If your skillet/pan is looking quite full at this stage, place a baking tray underneath it to ensure that if the fudge sauce bubbles over, it will not make a mess (takes a lot of the fun out of the cake if you have to clean burnt sugar off the oven!).

Bake for at least 45 minutes (check at 30 minutes to see if the cake is browning evenly) or until the cake starts to pull away from the sides and the centre feels just solid.

Remove from oven, let cool about 20 minutes, then place an ovenproof cake plate or biscuit slide, that is larger than the size of the skillet, on top, and wearing oven mitts, flip the cake over onto the plate or slide. Theoretically, the cake will let go of the skillet easily and in one piece. If some of the cake/fudge/fruit stays stuck to the skillet, do not despair! Simply arrange the stuck bits roughly where they should be on top of your cake and continue on...

Turn your oven setting to grill/top element and keeping a close eye on your cake, return it to the oven until the fudge layer gets really caramel and toffee-like, BUT NOT BURNT! Remove from oven when you've taken it as far as you dare.

Whilst it is nearly impossible to leave the cake alone even to get to lukewarm, it is one of those cakes that just gets better every day, so try to leave some in the fridge for at least 24 hours if you can.

That said, it is best served warm (reheated in the oven for extra fudginess or even in the microwave is fine), with a lovely (not too sweet!) custard or some ice-cream.



Corella pears ripening to a nice Corella colour.



Take the time to arrange your pear slices nicely – hopefully when you turn it over they'll stay where you put them.

Fresh from the oven, brown and firm in the middle, and smelling divine.

This cake is also delish made with green apples, rhubarb or quinces. If using quinces, they need to be poached until just tender and cooled in advance of assembly as they just will not go all soft and golden and be at their quincey best if not pre-cooked.

P.S. Seeing as wood fired ovens are our thing, I can't finish up without saying what a great wood-fired oven cake this is! As long as you make sure your oven floor is not too hot (the little flour scattering technique will sort that out) then this really is a terribly tolerant mix. Pop it in when your oven's cooling down and reap the rewards next day.

- *Tracy Hansen and her partner Peter Bergemann are the proprietors of Slow Food and Handforged Tools. Check out their website www.slowfoodandhandforgedtools.com.au or phone (07) 5447 0331 for more information.*



Pete attempts to sneak out to the verandah to eat his cake without paying the dog toll.