

Spice Cake (9x9")

Preheat oven to 350° F. Using “spreadable butter” or canola oil (see note 3), grease and flour a 9x9" baking pan.

In a heavy 2-quart saucepan, bring to a boil:

- 1 cup water
- 1 cup brown sugar (I use light but dark also works)
- 1-1/2 cups raisins
- 1/3 cup oil (I use canola or soybean)
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. ground cloves
- 1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp. salt [see note 5]

Boil for three minutes, then set aside and let cool to room temperature or thereabouts.

Sift and measure:

- 2 cups unbleached white flour

Resift with:

- 1/2 tsp. baking powder

In a small cup, mix:

- 1 tbsp. warm water
- 1 tsp. baking soda

Dump into the bowl with the other wet ingredients, stir in with a wooden spoon, then quickly stir in the dry ingredients. Stir well until smooth (not counting the raisins).

[Optional] Fold in:

- 1/2 cup coarsely-broken walnut pieces

Spoon and scrape into lightly-greased baking pan, and bake for 25 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool on a rack.

[Optional] Sprinkle with:
Confectioner's sugar

NOTES:

(1) This recipe is lifted, more or less unaltered, from Sylvia Rosenthal's "Live High on Low Fat" (New Enlarged Edition, J. B. Lippincott, 1975), an excellent book. Rosenthal calls these "Spice Squares". I've seen the recipe elsewhere; I suspect it originated during World War II, when milk, eggs and solid fats were rationed. The cake is vegan, if that's a concern for you or guests.

(2) When I make these, I usually do the walnuts, don't do the confectioner's sugar.

(3) I used to grease the pan with non-trans-fat soft margarine (Canola Harvest, once available at Shop 'n' Save). Lately I've been using Land o'Lakes Spreadable Butter – the one with canola oil, not the one with olive oil. Plain canola oil or Pam works too.

(4) Sifting the flour makes a difference; modern flour is presifted to remove husks, etc., but it settles, and if you use out-of-the-bag flour in a recipe designed for sifted (like this one), it's too dense and you wind up with more flour than you want, which makes the spice cake heavy.

(5) If you're on a reduced-salt diet, use 1/8 tsp or none.