

Esther's Orange-Marmalade Layer Cake-developed by Edna Lewis and Scott Peacock

Yields: 1 cake, 10 to 12 servings

For the Cake:

- 3 cups cake flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) softened unsalted butter
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature, beaten lightly
- 1 tablespoon grated orange zest
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 cup buttermilk, at room temperature

For the Orange Syrup:

- 1 cup freshly squeezed orange juice
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar

For the Filling:

- 1 cup orange marmalade

For the Frosting:

- 3/4 cup well-chilled heavy cream
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 3/4 cup well-chilled sour cream

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Butter two 9-inch round cake pans, line with parchment or waxed paper, and butter and flour the paper, shaking out the excess.
2. In a bowl, sift the flour, baking soda, and salt.
3. In a bowl with an electric mixer, beat the butter until combined, add the sugar, a little at a time, and beat the mixture until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs, orange zest, and vanilla. Beat in 1/3 of the dry ingredients alternately with 1/2 of the buttermilk until combined well. Add half the remaining dry ingredients and the remaining buttermilk and beat until combined well. Finally, beat in the remaining dry ingredients until mixture is smooth.
4. Evenly divide the batter between the pans, smooth the surface, rap each pan on the counter to expel any air pockets or bubbles, then transfer to the oven. Bake for 45 minutes or until a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Transfer to racks and cool in the pans for 20 minutes.

To Make the Orange Syrup:

5. Meanwhile, make the orange syrup: In a bowl, stir together the orange juice and sugar until sugar is dissolved.
6. With a toothpick or wooden skewer, poke holes at 1/2-inch intervals in the cake layers and spoon the syrup over each layer, allowing the syrup to be completely absorbed before adding the remaining. Let layers cool completely.

To Make the Filling:

7. In a small saucepan set over moderate heat, heat the marmalade until just melted. Let cool

5 minutes.

To Make the Frosting:

8. In a bowl, whisk the heavy cream with the sugar until it forms firm peaks. Add the sour cream, a little at a time, and whisk until of spreading consistency.

To Assemble the Cake:

9. Arrange one of the layers on a cake plate, carefully peel off the waxed paper, then spread 2/3 of the marmalade over the top, smoothing it into an even layer. Invert the remaining layer onto the top of the first layer, peel off the waxed paper and spoon the remaining marmalade onto the center of it, leaving a 1 1/4-inch border around the edge. Frost the sides and top of the border with the frosting, leaving the marmalade on top of the cake exposed. Or if you prefer, frost the entire cake, adding the marmalade as a garnish on top. Chill for at least 2 hours before serving.

Jan Karon, the author of the [Mitford Series](#), was a writer-in-residence for Victoria Magazine during part of the time that she was writing the series. Her readers were familiar with her description of Esther Bolick's Orange Marmalade and when pressed for a recipe, she claimed that it was completely fictional! Because we all drooled over the prospect of actually tasting that literary tease, Jan's editor at the magazine arranged for one to be created in an Atlanta kitchen by cookbook author [Edna Lewis](#) and chef [Scott Peacock](#).