

Spiced Buttermilk Cake with Pears + Crème Fraiche—adapted from Bon Appetit magazine

Pears:

- 2 Tablespoons sugar
- 1 Tablespoon fresh lime juice
- Pinch of salt
- 3 Bosc pears (about 1 ½ pounds), peeled, quartered, cored, and cut into ½-inch cubes

Mix sugar, lime juice, and salt in a heavy saucepan. Add pears and stir into juice mixture to cover. Cover and cook over medium heat until the pears are just tender, stirring occasionally, 10-12 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and chill, covered. You can make these a day ahead.

Cake:

- 1 cup plus 1 Tablespoon all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ⅛ teaspoon ground allspice
- ⅛ teaspoon ground ginger
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon ground whole star anise
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 (3-inch) piece vanilla bean, split length-wise
- ¼ teaspoon finely grated lime peel
- ¾ cup buttermilk
- Powdered sugar (optional)
- 1 ½ cups crème fraiche

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a 9-inch round cake pan.

Sift the first nine ingredients together. Set aside.

With an electric mixer, beat the butter until it is fluffy. Gradually add the sugar, beating until smooth. Beat in eggs, one at a time, beating until blended each time. Scrape in the seeds from the vanilla bean and add lime peel. Beat to blend.

Divide the flour mixture into four parts and add it to the butter/sugar mixture, alternately with the buttermilk, scraping down the bowl occasionally and ending with the flour. Pour the batter into the pan and bake until it starts to brown on top and a toothpick comes out clean, about 30 minutes.

Cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then scrape around the edges of the pan and turn the cake out onto a cooling rack. Let stand at room temperature. (Can be made a day ahead.) Sprinkle with powdered sugar if desired.

Serve in wedges, topped with pears and a dollop of crème fraiche.