



Makes: 12-16 servings

Prep Time: 1 hour Bake Time: 1 hour & 10 minutes

Total Time: 2 hours & 10 minutes plus chill time 5 hours

Ingredients

Crust:

- 2 cups graham cracker crumbs (about 16 full sheet graham crackers)
- 6 tbsp granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted

Cheesecake:

- 4 (8-ounce) blocks full-fat cream cheese, softened to room temperature
- 1 cup packed light or dark brown sugar (I recommend dark)
- 1 cup full-fat sour cream, at room temperature
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
- 1 tsp fresh lemon juice (optional, but recommended)
- 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature

Brown Sugar Pecan Topping:

- 1 & 1/2 cups pecan halves
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup packed light or dark brown sugar (I recommend dark)
- 6 tbsp heavy cream
- pinch of salt (less than 1/8 tsp)
- 1 tbsp light corn syrup
- optional: homemade brown sugar whipped cream (see Chef's Note)

Instructions

Adjust the oven rack to the center position, with a lower oven rack in place for the water bath, and preheat oven to 350°F.

Make the Crust:

If you're starting out with full graham crackers, use a food processor or blender to grind them into fine crumbs. Pour into a medium bowl and stir in sugar until combined, and then stir in the melted butter. Mixture will be sandy. Try to smash/break up any large chunks. Pour into an ungreased 9-inch or 10-inch springform pan. With medium pressure using your hand, pat the crumbs down into the bottom and partly up the sides to make a compact crust. Do not pack down with heavy force because that makes the crust too hard. Simply pat down until the mixture is no longer crumbly and you can use the flat bottom of a small measuring cup to help smooth it all out if needed. Pre-bake for 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and set aside to slightly cool as you prepare the filling.

Make the Filling:

Using a handheld or stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the cream cheese and brown sugar together on medium-high speed in a large bowl until the mixture is smooth and creamy, about 2 minutes. Add the sour cream, vanilla extract, lemon juice, and cinnamon, and then beat until fully combined. On medium speed, add the eggs one at a time, beating after each addition until just blended. After the final egg is incorporated into the batter, stop mixing. To help prevent the cheesecake from deflating and cracking, avoid over-mixing the batter as best you can. You will have close to 6 cups of batter.

Pour cheesecake batter into warm pre-baked crust. Use a rubber spatula or spoon to smooth it into an even layer.

Prepare the simple water bath (see recipe note for traditional water bath method): Boil a kettle or pot of water. You need 1 inch of water in your roasting pan for the water bath, so make sure you boil enough. Place the cheesecake on the center oven rack of the preheated oven. Place a large metal baking or roasting pan (I usually use a 9×13-inch baking pan—do not use glass) on the bottom rack. Pour boiling water into pan, about 1 inch deep. Immediately close oven to trap the steam inside. This unique water bath adds steam to the oven without having the cheesecake sit inside the water itself, which is the traditional water bath method explained in the recipe Notes.

Bake cheesecake for 55–70 minutes or until the center is almost set. If you notice the cheesecake browning too quickly on top, tent it with aluminum foil halfway through baking. I usually bake it for 30 minutes, tent it with foil, and bake for another 35 minutes. When it's done, the center of the cheesecake will slightly wobble if you gently shake the pan.

Turn the oven off and open the oven door slightly. Let the cheesecake sit in the oven as it cools down for 1 hour. Remove from the oven, then cool cheesecake completely at room temperature. Then refrigerate the cheesecake for at least 4 hours or overnight.

Topping:

Preheat oven to 300°F. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat. Spread the pecans on top and toast for 8–10 minutes or until fragrant and lightly browned. Set aside.

Heat the butter, brown sugar, heavy cream, salt, and corn syrup together in a medium saucepan over medium heat. With a spatula or whisk, stir occasionally until butter has melted and mixture is combined. Bring to a simmer. Once simmering, stop stirring and allow to simmer for 1–2 minutes. Remove from heat, and then stir in the toasted pecans. Cool topping completely before using. The sauce will thicken considerably as it cools.

Use a knife to loosen the chilled cheesecake from the rim of the springform pan, then remove the rim. Spoon cooled pecan pie topping on top of the cheesecake (or you can spoon it onto each individual slice). If desired, garnish with whipped cream. I used Wilton 8B piping tip for the pictured whipped cream. Using a clean sharp knife, cut into slices for serving. For neat slices, wipe the knife clean and dip into warm water between each slice.

Cover and store leftover cheesecake in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

Chef's Notes:

Make Ahead Instructions: This cheesecake can be made the day before. It has to chill for quite some time before serving. Another way to make this cheesecake ahead of time is to freeze it (without the topping). Cheesecake can be frozen up to 3 months.

Traditional Water Bath: Boil a pot of water. You need 1 inch of water in your roasting pan for the water bath, so make sure you boil enough. As the water is heating up, wrap aluminum foil around the springform pan—you can do this before or after you pour in the cheesecake batter. Place the wrapped pan inside of a large roasting pan. Carefully pour the hot water inside of the pan and place in the oven. (Or you can place the roasting pan in the oven first, then pour the hot water in. Whichever is easier for you.) Bake as directed. When cooling the cheesecake in the oven, leave it sitting inside the water bath. Remove it from the water bath when letting it cool at room temperature.

Brown Sugar Whipped Cream: If you'd like to make the optional brown sugar whipped cream, as pictured, whip 1 cup of heavy cream with 2 tablespoons of dark brown sugar and 1/2 teaspoon of vanilla extract. Whip until medium peaks form. This will take 3–4 minutes. For a decorative look, spoon whipped cream into a piping bag and use a Wilton 8B piping tip or spoon it over the cheesecake.

Recipe from Sally's Baking Addiction