

Mothering Sunday

A special day to express love and reverence for mothers is not entirely new. In England, since at least the 17th Century, the Fourth Sunday of Lent was known as "Mothering Sunday". It was a day when mothers were honoured. Servants who worked and normally resided in the homes of the wealthy were given the day off and encouraged to return to their homes and spend time with their mothers. A tradition arose involving the baking of special type of fruit cake, known as Simnel Cake, which would be shared both at home and at various gatherings. (The Fourth Sunday of Lent, complete with the very same cake, was also observed in some places as "Laetare (Rejoice/Refresh) Sunday", the predecessor of our modern "Laughter" or Holy Humour Sunday.) There appears to be no direct connection between Mothering Sunday and Mother's Day.

SIMNEL CAKES

A Traditional Lenten Cake

Associated With Mothering Sunday and Laetare Sunday

The following was originally posted on the site of the Anglican Catholic Church as a seasonal resource in 1999. It has been adapted for this site. Any errors on this page are ours and not that of the original authors - whom we thank for their work.

Simnel cakes are called such because of the fine flour (Latin "simila") they were made of. These cakes were baked and sold on Lenten Sundays in both England and France. The French baked their cakes muffin-size and drew sugar crosses on the top. These were their equivalent of the English Hot Cross Bun.

In England, the Simnel cake is especially associated with the 4th Sunday in Lent called *Refreshment, Rose, or Mothering Sunday*. That day was the older version of Mother's Day. Children of all ages were expected to pay a formal visit to their mothers and to bring a Simnel cake as a gift. In return, the mothers gave their children a special blessing. This custom was so well-established that masters were required to give servants enough time off to visit out-of-town mothers - provided the trip did not exceed 5 days!

The Simnel cake is also associated with "Holy Humour Sunday" or "Laughter Sunday" which is celebrated in certain places on the 4th Sunday in Lent, especially in North America, where "Mothering Sunday" has given way to "Mother's Day" (see Laughter Sunday)

A Recipe For Simnel Cake

Ingredients

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ Cups butter
4 Cups flour
8 eggs
1 teaspoon salt

4 Cups sugar
2/3 Cup grated lemon & orange peel
2 Cups currants
8 oz. (or more) almond paste

Mixing & Baking Directions

Cream butter and sugar until smooth.
Add eggs singly, beating after each one
Sift and add flour and salt.
Dust peel and currants with flour and
add to batter.

Line 12" x 15" greased pan with
waxpaper.
Pour in $\frac{1}{2}$ batter.
Bake at 300 degrees for one hour.
May be iced if desired.
Cut cake into small 1" squares as it is
very rich. (Freezes well.)

Another Recipe For Simnel Cake

The following recipe for Simnel Cake varies from the one above in that it has more fruit and spices. Some describe this as a rich plum cake enclosed in a hard dough crust, some say it is a currant cake, and some insist it has a marzipan frosting. There are probably as many variations of Simnel cake as there are imaginative cooks who add a special "something" from their cupboard. The following recipe is delicious and very easy to make. Try making it to enjoy with your family and friends or to take to church and share at the coffee hour.

Ingredients	
<p>1½ Cups flour ½ teaspoon baking powder ¼ teaspoon allspice ¼ teaspoon cinnamon ¼ teaspoon nutmeg ¼ teaspoon ground cloves ¼ Cup softened butter ¾ Cup sugar</p>	<p>½ Cup golden raisins ¾ teaspoon currants 1 Cup chopped candied fruits such as cherries, pineapple slices 2 Tablespoons mixed candied fruit peel 3 eggs beaten lightly ½ teaspoon vanilla 2 Tablespoons brandy</p>
Mixing & Baking Directions	
<p>Set the oven 300 degrees Mix raisins, currants, candied fruits, and candied peel with 1 tablespoon and set aside. Sift remaining flour, baking powder, allspice, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves and set aside. In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar together until light. Beat in eggs, brandy, and vanilla. A food processor or electric mixer may be used.</p>	<p>Beat in flour mix gradually until just combined. Add the fruit and peel mix to the batter and combine well. Turn the batter into a greased layer-cake pan and press down the surface with the back of a spoon to smooth. Bake 1 ¼ until a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Let cool before removing from pan and cool completely before frosting.</p>
Frosting	
<p>Beat 1/3 Cup softened butter until light Gradually beat in 3 ½ Cups confectioner's sugar until fluffy.</p>	<p>Beat 2 teaspoons vanilla and about 3 Tablespoons milk until smooth. If it seems too thick, add a little more milk.</p>

Sources

The first recipe is from *The Christian Year, A cookbook for Holy Days & Seasons*; by the Women of St. Thomas of Canterbury, Anglican Catholic Church, Roanoke, Virginia.

The second recipe is from *A Lenten Companion*, Molly Cochran McConnell, Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church (Arlington VA)

Laetare or Mothering Sunday

The mood of Lent is usually sober, thoughtful, and attended by strict personal disciplines. However, in times past, the fourth Sunday in Lent, known variously as "Mothering Sunday," "Refreshment Sunday," or "Laetare Sunday," became a time to relieve the austerity of the Lenten disciplines and ready the faithful for the intense drama of Holy Week and its joyful climax of Easter. Several traditions became associated with this fourth Sunday in Lent. In England, "simnel" cake (click link for a recipe), cake made with fine flour, was served to ease the Lenten fast. Today in many parishes a large pound cake is baked and served at the coffee hour. One of the Gospel lessons appointed for this day (John 6:4-15 - Year B) is the story of the feeding of the five thousand, hence, the name "Refreshment Sunday."

In the British Isles the custom arose for children away at school, or in domestic service, to be given the day off to visit their mothers, so the day came to be called "Mothering Sunday." Originally it was known as "Laetare Sunday." "Laetare", meaning "rejoice", was the first word of the traditional choral introit used at the beginning of the service for that Sunday.

However it is celebrated, the fourth Sunday in Lent is a time for us to change our focus from repentance for our sins to the contemplation of the events of Holy Week, which leads us to the most holy of all feast days - The Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Adapted from D. Triplett, *Earthen Vessels*, Jan. 1997

Simnel Cake

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups flour	2 cups dried currants, soaked in hot water for 15 min and drained
$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp baking powder	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped candied fruit peel
2 tbsp butter	1 egg, lightly beaten
2 tbsp lard	whole blanched almonds or walnuts
6 tbsp sugar	candied cherries
$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground cinnamon	thinly sliced candied citron peel
$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp freshly grated nutmeg	

Preheat oven to 400 (F)

Rub the butter and lard into the flour and then add the sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, currants and chopped candied peel, mixing well. Add the egg, and mix all of the ingredients into a very stiff dough, adding a little milk if necessary. Form the dough into a round, flat patty about 7 to 8 inches across and place it on a buttered baking sheet. Decorate the cake with the nuts, cherries and citron peel, and bake for 30 minutes, or until golden brown.

Here is another one, with a fancy marzipan filling and topping (fairly common)

Simnel Cake

Preparation Time: 30 minutes **Cooking Time:** About 2 hours

Ingredients

225g (8oz) Butter, softened	125g (4oz) Glace Cherries
225g (8oz) Light Muscovado Sugar	50g (2oz) Mixed Peel
4 Large Eggs, beaten	1 x 500g Block Almond Marzipan
Grated Zest of 1 Lemon or Orange	Icing Sugar and Cornflour for dusting
275g (10oz) Plain Flour, sifted	2 x 15ml (2 tbsp) Apricot Jam, warmed and sieved
Pinch of Salt	Mini Easter Eggs, Spring Violets or 1 x 250g Block Almond Marzipan to decorate (optional)
1 x 5ml (1 tsp) Baking Powder, sifted	
225g (8oz) Sultanas	
125g (4oz) Currants	

Method

Step 1

Generously grease a 20cm (8") cake tin and line with a double thickness of greaseproof paper. Preheat the oven to 160°C/325°F/Gas Mark 3.

Step 2

Cream the butter and sugar until it is pale and fluffy and falls easily from the spoon. Beat in a quarter of the egg with the citrus zest, then add the remaining egg, a quarter at a time, beating well between each addition. If it starts to curdle, beat in a spoonful of flour.

Step 3

Fold the flour, salt and baking powder into the cake mixture.

Step 4

Stir in the dried fruit until it is evenly combined. Spread half of the mixture into the tin and level the surface.

Step 5

Roll out a generous half of the 500g marzipan on a surface lightly dusted with icing sugar and cornflour and trim to a 20cm (8") round. Set on top of the cake mixture, pressing it down lightly. Wrap the remaining marzipan in clingfilm and leave in the fridge.

Step 6

Top the marzipan with the remaining cake mixture and level the surface. Cook in the centre of the oven for about 2 hours until cake is risen and firm. Leave in the tin until cool enough to handle, then transfer to a wire rack to go cold.

Step 7

To decorate, roll out the reserved marzipan to a 20cm (8") round. Brush the surface of the cake with the jam and lightly press the marzipan on top, then crimp the edges. Use the 250g block of marzipan to make marzipan balls, or decorate with mini eggs or violets.