

Almond apple cake with sherry and rosemary

[makes a 9x13" cake; 12-24 slices, depending on size]

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Prepare the apples:

- 6-8 apples, depending on size (about 3 pounds total; any type will do -- though smaller, firmer varieties tend to be easier to work with than larger, softer ones)
- ¼ cup melted butter*
- 1/3 cup sherry*
- ½ teaspoon salt*
- 2 tablespoons turbinado sugar*
- about 3 ounces firm almond paste or marzipan
- about ½ ounce sliced almonds (about 2 tablespoons; up to 54 slices)

*more of this ingredient will be needed later; see below.

Remove and discard apple stems. Peel apples and cut each one in half down the center. Scoop out seeds and core of each half using a small rounded spoon. Use a paring knife to remove any lingering spine or stem pieces. Set apples cut side down and check to make sure they are all no thicker than about an inch, and are all about the same thickness. If needed, gently trim thin slices from the non-cored sides of apples, in order to create the right size.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Line inner bottom of a 9 x 13" pan with parchment, then spread 2 tablespoons of the melted butter evenly onto parchment. Place apples in lined pan cut-side-up; you should have 12 to 16 apple halves, depending on size. Whisk the remaining 2 tablespoons melted butter with 1/3 cup sherry. Spoon all of the mixture over apples, filling the cored-out centers and letting it overflow. Sprinkle evenly with ½ teaspoon salt and 2 tablespoons turbinado sugar.

Bake for 30-35 minutes (a bit shorter if apples are very small). Remove apples from oven; leave oven on. Let apples cool in pan until cool enough to handle. Then transfer apples to a plate, cut side up -- leaving all liquid behind in the cake pan for now (you'll need it later).

Shape almond paste or marzipan into small, slightly flattened balls that will fit into each apple center without poking out (you want the apples flush against the pan). Press at least three almond slices firmly against a flat side of each ball, then gently place in apple centers, almond side up. The sliced nuts will help keep almond paste from sticking to the parchment when baked (do not skip). Set aside.

[recipe continues on next page]

Prepare the cake:

- 2 cups all purpose flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup almond meal (preferably skin-on; not blanched)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup turbinado sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup melted butter
- 3 eggs at room temperature
- 1.5 teaspoons almond extract
- 1.5 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1.25 cup apple juice
- Up to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sherry
- 2 teaspoons finely minced fresh rosemary, loosely packed (optional)

With oven at 350 F, pour remaining sherry-butter liquid from pan into a measuring cup that holds at least $\frac{3}{4}$ cup liquid. Set aside. Remove and discard parchment, and wipe out baking pan with a paper towel. Re-grease inside of pan and line with a fresh piece of parchment, leaving a generous overhang on the long edges. Then generously grease parchment at the bottom of pan where apples will sit when baked.

Place stuffed apple halves in pan, cut side down in rows, very gently pressing into place so that apples are flat against the parchment. Set aside.

Into a medium bowl, sift the flour, salt, baking soda and baking powder. Whisk in the almond meal until evenly dispersed and no lumps remain. Set aside.

In a large bowl, mix the turbinado sugar and melted butter. Beat in the eggs one at a time, followed by the extracts. Add the mixed dry ingredients in 2 - 3 portions, alternating with the apple juice, stirring until ingredients are incorporated. Be sure to scrape bowl often with a rubber spatula as you mix.

Add more sherry to the leftover sherry-butter liquid to make $\frac{3}{4}$ cup total liquid. Add to batter and mix just until consistency is even and smooth. Fold in rosemary if using, stirring until evenly dispersed. Slowly pour batter over the arranged apples. Then tap pan gently on counter just 2-3 times to release any hidden air bubbles.

Bake on center oven rack for about 35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center (preferably between apples) comes out free of wet batter. Surface will be toasty brown; don't worry if it cracks -- the top becomes the hidden bottom.

Remove cake from oven and let cool in pan until lukewarm or room temperature. When ready to serve (preferably between 2 - 8 hours of baking), invert cake onto serving plate or cutting board. Remove parchment, cut and enjoy! Cake tastes best at room temperature or slightly warmed.