

Lemon Cheese Cake

Crust:

2¹/₄ cups finely ground (use a food processor) graham crackers (about 34 squares)
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted

Filling:

3 (8-ounce) blocks cream cheese, room temperature
1¹/₂ cup sugar
4-5 eggs
1¹/₂ teaspoon vanilla extract
2 lemons, zest finely grated
1¹/₂ pint sour cream

To prepare crumb crust: In a mixing bowl, combine the crust ingredients together with a fork until evenly moistened. Lightly coat the bottom and sides of a 11-inch springform™ pan with non-stick cooking spray. Firmly press the mixture over the bottom and up the sides on the pan, using your fingers, a spatula or the smooth bottom of a glass. Refrigerate the crust while preparing the filling.

To prepare filling: In a large bowl, beat the cream cheese on low speed for 1 minute just until smooth and free of any lumps. Gradually add the sugar and beat until creamy, 1 to 2 minutes. Periodically scrape down the sides of the bowl and the beaters. Add the eggs, 1 at a time, and continue to slowly beat until combined. Stir in the vanilla and lemon zest. Blend in the sour cream. The batter should be well mixed but not overbeaten. Overbeating incorporates too much air and will cause the cake to puff when baking, then fall and crack when cooling. Pour filling into the crust-lined pan and smooth the top with a spatula.

Place springform pan on a baking sheet and bake in a preheated 325 degree oven for 70 minutes. The cheesecake should still jiggle, it will firm up after chilling. Be careful not to overcook! Do not do a toothpick test in the cake's center, this will make a crack. Loosen the cheesecake from the sides of the pan by running a thin metal spatula around the inside rim. Let cool in the pan for 30 minutes. Chill in the refrigerator, loosely covered, for at least 4 hours to set up. De-mold and transfer to a cake plate. Slice the cheesecake with a thin, non-serrated knife that has been dipped in hot water and wiped dry after each cut.