

Deeply Pumpkiny Pumpkin Cheesecake

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Note that you will need a cleaver to cut into a whole kabocha. A chef's knife will suffice for cutting chunks after that. If you don't have a cleaver, purchase pre-cut squash. Be sure to use a natural cream cheese with no gums or other stabilizers. I like Gina Marie or Sierra Nevada Cheese Company (same product, different packaging). The recipe is adapted from *The Artful Baker* by Cenk Sönmezsoy (Abrams).

Ingredients

Crust

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted and cooled, plus more for the pan
½ cup fine homemade graham cracker crumbs
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon plus a pinch more

Filling

1 to 1-¼ pounds unpeeled kabocha squash
6 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons sugar
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract plus a few more drops
5 ounces full-fat cream cheese, at room temperature
Pinch sea salt
1 large egg, at room temperature
⅓ cup heavy cream, at room temperature

Topping

¼ cup crème fraîche, lightly whipped
1 tablespoon very finely ground pistachios



Directions

Set a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat the oven to 350°F.

Butter the bottom and sides of an 8- by 4- by 2-1/2-inch loaf pan. Cut a strip of parchment paper 4 inches wide and long enough to overhang the ends of the pan by an inch. Lay it in the pan lengthwise and butter it. Cut another strip of parchment paper 8 inches wide and long enough to overhang the sides of the pan by an inch. Lay it in the pan perpendicular to the bottom sheet so it covers the pan sides. Trim the parchment even with the pan rim.

To make the crust, in a medium bowl, stir the butter, crumbs and cinnamon together with a fork until the crumbs are evenly moistened. Scrape the mixture into the prepared pan and press it with

the back of a spoon into an even layer on the bottom only. Bake until set, about 12 minutes. Set the pan on a wire rack to cool completely. Leave the oven on.

To make the filling, discard the squash seeds and stringy fibers in the cavity. Cut the squash into 3-inch chunks (no need to peel). Put them in a baking dish and cover tightly with aluminum foil. Bake until the squash is tender when pierced, about 1 hour. Let cool completely, then scoop the flesh out of the skin. Reduce the oven temperature to 325°F.

Puree the squash in a food processor until completely smooth. Measure out 1/2 cup puree and reserve any remainder for another use. Transfer the puree to a bowl and stir in the sugar and vanilla.

Fill a tea kettle with water and bring to a boil.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle, beat the cream cheese and salt at medium speed until smooth. Add the squash puree and beat until well blended. Add the egg and cream and beat on low speed until well blended, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread it evenly. Set the pan inside a larger pan and set it on the oven rack. Add enough boiling water to come halfway up the sides of the cake pan. Bake until the center of the cheesecake jiggles slightly when you shake the pan gently, 50 to 55 minutes. Turn the oven off, prop the door slightly open with a wooden spoon, and let the cheesecake cool in the oven for 1 hour. Carefully remove the pan from the water bath and set the pan on a wire rack to cool completely. Cover the pan with aluminum foil, poke holes in the foil to prevent condensation, and refrigerate for at least 5 hours or preferably overnight.

To serve, using the parchment overhang as handles, lift the cheesecake out of the pan and transfer to a cutting board. (Four hands are helpful here.) With a clean, thin-bladed knife, cut the cheesecake crosswise into 6 rectangles. Transfer the pieces to a serving plate. Fit a pastry bag with a medium closed 7-point star tip (Ateco #846). Fill with crème fraîche and pipe a star onto each rectangle. Sprinkle the ground pistachios over the stars and serve.

Serves 6