

MAMA'S FRESH COCONUT CAKE

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Follow our step-by-step, recipe to make this old fashioned, southern favorite, that I refer to as Mama's Fresh Coconut Cake. We're grating fresh coconut, making layers from scratch, doing everything just the way Mama did to make one of her best cakes. It wasn't about looks to Mama, it just needed to taste great. I think you'll agree. We'll show you how to make one of your own. .

Mama's Fresh Coconut Cake, made from scratch:

I've written several times here on Taste of Southern, about Sunday dinners at our house when I was much younger. We'd have 10-15 folks over just about each Sunday, and most of the time, that would include our current pastor and his family. Mama's big oval dining room table would be overflowing with all the great dishes she had prepared, and we'd all stuff ourselves with good food, good conversation, and lots of laughs.

Sometimes, the adults would gather around the dining room table, while the smaller kids would eat at the kitchen table. Other times, the kids would have to wait until the grownups were finished before they had a chance to eat. By this time, I was old enough to sit with the adults, and those memories are some of my fondest while growing up Gordon.

Mama almost always served some type of cake for dessert once the dishes were cleared from the tables. Her yellow cake with chocolate frosting would have been my all time favorite, and of course I was really happy to get one on each of my birthdays. Her coconut cake would have been my second favorite, and a pineapple cake would have probably been my third choice. She made others, but those were favorites.

Mama's cakes weren't the prettiest things in the world, but the taste certainly made up for the looks. Cake layers weren't always even, and sometimes they would sort of slide a bit because of the frosting's that she used. Especially the chocolate one's. But, it didn't matter one bit.

Anytime Mama could get her hands on a fresh coconut, we'd be blessed to enjoy some mighty fine eating. She did use canned coconut sometimes, but the one's with the freshly grated coconut were her best.

If you had been sitting around that table, you would have seen Mama bring out a big old cake that looked just like this one. What I remember about it most, was that you could see the cake layers right through the icing. I can't call it a frosting, because it was more like just a simple syrup she made and poured all over the layers, then sprinkled the top with some freshly grated coconut. As mentioned, it didn't matter about the looks, it was just mouth watering delicious.

There's just something about fresh grated coconut cakes that other cakes can't even compare too. Whether it's all the love and labor that goes into making it, or because it was something you just didn't have every week, one or the other made it a real treat.

Today, most folks just don't have the time to crack a coconut, drain the liquid from inside, peel that brown skin off the meat, then spend 45 minutes trying to grate all the little pieces. Mama didn't mind though, her family was worth it, and she loved every minute of it. At least it seemed that way.

Last week, we had a Cousins Reunion. It's a gathering of what's left of us from Mama's side of the family. Mama, all her sisters, and her brothers, have all passed away now. For several years my older brother talked about us all getting together, and we finally made it happen about 3 years ago. We'd

been attending another family reunion for years, but that one just sort of faded away. The Cousins Reunion is a last ditch effort to keep us all together for as long as possible.

Last year, we had just about 100 folks to show up. This year, we only had about 35. We'd changed the location of the gathering this year to another town, so we're not sure if that kept some of the cousin's away or not. We hope to do much better next year though. Good Lord willing.

We started a little friendly cake baking competition last year, and decided to do it again this year. I knew I wanted to make Mama's Coconut Cake to place in the competition. As it turned out, only one other cousin brought a cake to enter. We did have others that brought cakes, but several of them were store bought. Somehow, it was just me and the other cousin in this little competition. And, wouldn't you know it, she made a coconut cake as well.

Everyone had ate lunch, and already hit the dessert table by the time we had the judging for the cakes. Three cousins were asked to do the taste testing and pick a winner. I of course kept picking at my other cousin about how I had hand grated the coconut for my cake, and she hadn't. Her's looked much better than mine though, no arguing about that. She made a cream cheese frosting for hers.

After much debate, conversation, and more testing, the judges finally reached a decision. Somehow, a couple more cousins had got in on the taste testing, but the decision of the judges was final. It was announced that MY cake had been selected as the winner. Sorry cuz, better luck next year. (Smile) Seriously though, her cake was pretty awesome itself.

Of course, the most crucial vote was yet to be had. I knew coconut cake was my older brothers favorite, and now I wanted to be sure that he got a slice to try. I had another cousin to take a slice over to him.

Older brother loves these Cousins Reunions. It's a time to get together and talk old memories with many of them together. I think he could stay and talk all day and all night if the rest of them would. So, getting him to take time to taste the cake may not have been top priority. He was over in the kitchen of the church fellowship hall... talking.

After everyone started to leave, I tried to coax a reaction out of him regarding the cake. He said someone brought him a piece of cake, he tried it and... it was good. Hmmm. Is that all I could get out of him?

The following Monday, we were back on the road to deliver one of his pig cookers. After much conversation about the reunion, how attendance had dropped and what could we do to bring it back up, I managed to work in another question about the cake.

This time, he said he liked the cake that he was given, and that "it tasted like Mama's." As you can imagine, that was all I had really hoped to hear.

I have another recipe for a [Baker's Coconut Cake](#) here on Taste of Southern. I found the recipe in a small advertising booklet in a box of papers I purchased at a local auction. It's a good cake, but doesn't call for freshly grated coconut. The layers from that recipe are what I'm using here, with just a bit more Vanilla. Older brother made the comment that the layers from the cake really reminded him of what Mama use to make. I think it was that little extra bit of Vanilla flavoring in the batter that did it.

The icing is much like simple syrup. Instead of using regular water, Mama always used the liquid from the fresh coconut to make it. Much like a boiled frosting, or even a [Seven Minute Frosting](#), you will need to boil the sugar, coconut liquid, and some of the grated coconut to make the icing itself. I'll show you how in the steps below. I'll even show you how to prepare that fresh coconut, so you don't have any excuse for not making this at least once. Mama would be proud to know you tried.

So, with my "Prize Winning Certificate" hanging on the wall, and the 10.00 prize money in my pocket, let's get busy and make a really good coconut cake. Ready to give it a try? Alright then, preheat the oven, get out the mixer, and... Let's Get Cooking!

Fresh Coconut Cake: You'll need these ingredients.

Prepare the fresh coconut: We're using fresh coconut to make this cake, and you can learn everything you'll need to know about draining the liquid, cracking, peeling and grating a fresh coconut by following the tutorial we've created for you here on Taste of Southern. Just follow this link to see how it's done. [How To Open A Fresh Coconut](#)

Yes, it will take a little effort, but the taste and satisfaction of using a fresh coconut will be well worth the final results. I highly encourage you to try it at least once in your life. But, if you decide you just aren't ready for taking that step just yet, you can certainly use frozen coconut. Frozen coconut is different from the dry, sweetened, flake coconut you'll find in a bag on the grocery store shelf. Make the frozen coconut your first choice if you can find that. It's usually available in the frozen foods

section of most grocery stores. It will be a close second to using fresh coconut.

RESERVE the liquid from the coconut. You'll need that later on as part of the icing.

Measure out level cups of flour into a large mixing bowl.

Add the baking powder.

Add the salt.

Mix all the dry ingredients together.

Sift the dry ingredients three times.

After whisking the dry ingredients together, I place it into my sifter. Normally, I'll sift this out onto a piece of parchment paper. I place the sifter back in the empty bowl, and picking up the sides of the parchment paper, I can easily pour the flour back into the sifter. I do this three times to fully incorporate the baking powder and salt into the flour, and to aerate the flour. Easier than it sounds, but don't overlook this step. Set the flour aside for now.

Place the room temperature butter into a large mixing bowl.

Using a mixer, beat the butter on low speed until it's creamy and fluffy.

Gradually add sugar, while you continue to cream the sugar and butter together.

Cream the butter and sugar together until it's well mixed.

Add the eggs, one at a time, to the sugar and butter mixture. Do not over beat the batter. Add one egg, mix it just a few seconds, until it's fully combined, then repeat the process. Do this until you have all four eggs mixed into the batter.

Add one third of the flour to the batter.

Mix the flour just enough to combine it into the batter. Do not over mix.

Add half a cup of the milk.

Add the Vanilla extract.

Mix again, just a few seconds, to combine the milk and vanilla extract into the batter.

Add another third of the flour.

Mix a few more seconds, just enough to combine the flour into the mixture.

Add the other half cup of milk. Mix this a few more seconds to combine the milk.

Add the last bit of flour.

Mix the flour, scraping down the sides of the bowl. Do not over beat.

I know the urge to just mix everything until it looks like it's all mixed in fully. You need to mix as little as possible so as not to over beat the batter. Get it all combined, but don't get carried away. You can do it.

The batter is ready for the oven.

Grease and flour two 9 inch cake pans.

I've been using the spray type of baking sprays that contain flour for my baking lately. Be sure to get the one that has flour already in it if you do the same. Otherwise, you can use some cooking oil, butter or shortening to fully grease the pans. Then, place a little flour in the pans, and roll it all around the inside to fully coat the bottom and edges of the pans. Tap out any excess flour that might remain.

Divide the batter into the two pans. I used my one cup measuring cup to measure out the batter. I did it so I could tell you how much batter was going into each pan. I'm sorry, but I forgot to write it

down, and now I don't remember. Just equal it out as best as possible.

Use the back of a spoon to spread the batter out evenly inside the pans. I start in the center, then gently spread the batter out towards the edges. Once I've done that, I pick the pan up several inches above the counter top and just drop it. This will help force any air bubbles in the batter to the top where they will break. Pick it up and drop it a couple of times, before you place the pans in the oven.

BAKE at 350 degrees for 25 to 30 minutes.

I'll always try to remind you that ovens vary, so you may need more or less time to fully bake your layers. Try not to open the oven during the first 15 minutes of baking so the layers don't fall. Pretty much once you start smelling them, you'll be safe to open the oven. Test the layers to see if they're done by inserting a toothpick or wooden skewer into the center of the cake. If it pulls out clean, the layers are done. If it pulls out with crumbs attached, or still looks wet, the layer needs to bake a little longer. The layer should have slightly pulled away from the edges of the pan and will spring back when lightly pressed in the center.

When the layers are done, carefully remove them from the oven and place them on wire racks to cool. If you don't have any wire racks, place them on a folded cloth towel.

After the cakes have cooled on the racks for about 10 minutes, you'll need to turn them out of the pans.

Run a butter knife around the edges of the cake layer inside of the pan. This will help to loosen the baked layer from the pan. Place another wire rack on top of the cake layer, and holding it all together, flip it over so the cake will come out of the pan. If the layer doesn't fall out immediately, you can try tapping on the layer with the blunt end of the butter knife so that it loosens the cake from the bottom of the pan and it falls out onto the wire rack.

Flip the layer again so that the top of the layer is up on the rack. This will prevent any indentations from being in the top of your layers. If all of this is confusing for you, be sure to check out my other tutorial on [Basic Cake Layers](#), for a little more in-depth instructions.

Let the layers cool completely before adding the frosting.

I usually grate the coconut while the layers are cooling. See how much I got from just one fresh coconut. Part of the fun in grating a coconut, is to see how small you can get that last little piece to be. Just watch the knuckles though. Trust me on that one.

TO MAKE THE ICING:

Place the sugar for the icing in a medium sized mixing bowl.

Add the flour.

Mix the flour and sugar together.

Place the sugar and flour mixture into a medium sized sauce pot.

Add the coconut water that you reserved when you drained the coconut.

You should have at least a cup of coconut water. More will not hurt, so use what you have. But, if you don't have at least a cup, add enough tap water to the measuring cup to bring the liquid level up to the one cup mark.

Place the sauce pot on Medium heat on your stove top. Continue to stir this closely, and let the mixture come up to a slow simmer as the sugar dissolves. Let it simmer for five minutes, as you continue to stir often. Just don't let it burn and stick to the bottom.

Divide the coconut. You'll need to save out about one third of the grated coconut to top the cake with. The remaining coconut will be added to the sugar in the stock pot. I ended up with just about three cups total of grated coconut, so 2 cups went into the stock pot, and one was kept aside for sprinkling on top of the cake.

The coconut added to the sugar will need to come back up to a very low simmer. Let this simmer for about 4 or 5 minutes longer, stirring constantly so it doesn't stick or burn. The syrup/icing needs to thicken just a little but not too much. If you over cook it, it may turn into candy. You also want it thin enough to seep down into the holes that you've punched in the layers. More on that in a minute.

ASSEMBLE THE CAKE:

I trimmed the top off of one of the layers to give it more of a flat surface to work with. I may have also used that as an excuse to taste the cake itself prior to taking it to the Cousins Reunion. Maybe, maybe not. Just saying.

Then, I used a large bread knife to split the layer in half. You don't have to do this part, I was just going for the effect.

This is one of Mama's old cake pans. Most of her cakes were 3 layers in size, and baked in pans like this one. That long slider part in the middle was used to help release the cake from the pan after it was baked. It was a pretty smart idea, it's just kind of hard to clean out from under the slider. The idea was the cake would bake, then you would pull that slider around the pan and it would free the layer from the bottom if it was sticking anywhere. Smart huh? I only have one, so I decided to use my regular 9 inch pans and split the layers so it would look more like Mama's. I've seen these pans still for sale online. If you're interested in them, you can easily do a search and find some.

Place a small dab of the icing on a plate, or in this case, on the cardboard circle. The little bit of icing will help hold the layer as you build the cake. Once you've got the layer centered, take a wooden skewer, or something similar, and poke holes all around the top of the layer. This will allow the icing to soak down into the layer for a more moist cake.

Spread some of the icing all across the top of the layer, making sure you get it right up to the edge of each layer. You'll have to estimate how much to use for each layer as best as you can. You'll want enough for each layer, and enough for the top of the cake. Don't worry about it running down the sides, you'll need for that to happen somewhat.

Continue to build the cake, adding one layer on top of the next, with icing in between. Coat the top layer with the remaining icing, spreading some around the outside edges as well. Then, take the remaining grated coconut that you have and sprinkle it across the top. Pat some of the coconut around the outside edges, where it will stick to any of the icing that has dribbled down the sides. Wipe away any icing and coconut from the rim of the plate as needed.

This cake will be best if you can place it in the refrigerator for at least 24 hours. A covered cake plate or carrier will work great for this. Wrapping it in clear plastic might be a bit messy, but it needs to be covered while it's in the fridge so that it doesn't absorb any odors from other items that might be in

the refrigerator.

When ready to serve, bring the cake out and let it come back up to room temperature for an hour or so prior to serving.

I do hope you'll try Mama's Coconut Cake recipe, and that you'll grate at least one coconut in your life. Let me know.

Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS

1 Whole Coconut, fresh, grated and divided. Reserve Liquid Coconut Milk
2 sticks Butter, softened (1 cup)
4 Eggs, room temperature
2 cups Granulated Sugar
3 cups All-Purpose Flour
3 teaspoons Baking Power
½ teaspoon Salt
2 teaspoons Vanilla Extract 1 cup Evaporated Milk For Boiled Icing:
3 cups Granulated Sugar
3 Tablespoons Flour
1 cup Coconut Water, reserved from fresh coconut
2 cups Coconut, freshly grated