

Extra Coconut Cake

Makes one tall 9-inch or a taller 8-inch cake

Coconut cakes are, by definition, extra. They should be tall and fuzzy like an obnoxious angora sweater. They are for parties, they are for celebrations, they are for keeping under a cake dome for you to cut thin slices off over the course of a full calendar week (I do not have a cake dome, but). Part of the charm of the coconut cake is in the layering—I'm a big fan of slicing each layer of cake horizontally to expose the inside, which then gets covered in frosting. This produces an insanely rich, "moist" cake, with a good amount of frosting in each bite. If it were up to me, I would fill all my cakes this way (you can!). You, of course, do not have to do this—if slicing a cake like that makes you nervous, you can skip that step, just know your cake layers will be much thicker, with a different ratio of cake to frosting (but nevertheless delicious).

Ingredients

Cooking spray

2½ cups/360g all-purpose flour

2½ cups/225g unsweetened finely shredded coconut—I prefer Bob's Red Mill (it's about 150g for 2 ½ cups coarsely shredded coconut)

1 tablespoon/12g baking powder

1¾ teaspoons/7g kosher salt

1½ cups/360g buttermilk

⅓ cup/70g melted coconut, grapeseed, or canola oil

1 teaspoon/5g vanilla extract

2½ sticks/10 ounces/285g unsalted butter, at room temperature, cut into 1-inch pieces

2 cups/440g sugar

4 large eggs

Salty Vanilla Frosting (on my site, or on page 293 of Sweet Enough)

1 cup/110g unsweetened coconut chips, flakes, or more shredded coconut

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Spray three 8-inch or two 9-inch cake pans with cooking spray and line with rounds of parchment.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, coconut, baking powder, and salt.
3. In another medium bowl, whisk together the buttermilk, coconut oil, and vanilla.
4. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle (or in a large bowl with an electric hand mixer), beat the butter and sugar together until extremely pale and fluffy, 4–5 minutes. Scrape down the sides and add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Continue beating until the mixture is smooth, fluffy, and well incorporated, 2–3 minutes.
5. With the mixer on low, add about half the flour mixture, followed by the buttermilk mixture, followed by the remaining flour mixture (the idea being you don't want to add too much liquid to the egg mixture or it'll have a hard time incorporating, and you don't want to overmix the flour, which will give you a tough cake).
6. Divide the batter evenly among the prepared pans and smooth the top. Bake until the cakes spring back lightly when touched at the top, look pale and blond on top and a nice golden brown on the sides, 30–35 minutes for the 9-inch and closer to 25–30 minutes for the 8-inch.
7. Let the cakes cool completely (either transfer them to a wire rack or let them cool in their pans), at least 1 hour at room temperature (do not rush the process by sticking them in the fridge).

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8. If working with 9-inch cakes, use a long serrated knife to slice each one in half horizontally. It doesn't have to be perfect, nobody will notice if it's a little lopsided, I promise. If working with 8-inch cakes, you won't have to slice anything, just proceed to the next step.
9. Lay one layer (either the halved 9-inch or the whole 8-inch) on a plate lined with parchment (or not). Spoon $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (for the four-layer 9-inch or three-layer 8-inch, respectively) frosting onto the layer and use an offset spatula, spoon, or butter knife to spread it into an even layer. Top with another layer of cake. (Tip: If your cake is “domed” more than you'd like, invert it, so the flat side is facing up, not down, creating a flat top) and repeat with more frosting. Repeat until you've used all the cake layers.
10. Once you get to the top, spread a thin layer of frosting all over the cake (this is known as a “crumb coat” — think of it as a primer), making sure to get into the sides and crevices created during the slicing/layering. Pop the cake into the fridge to set for 30–60 minutes (but leave the rest of the frosting at room temperature).
11. Meanwhile, in a medium skillet, gently toast the coconut flakes over medium heat, tossing constantly, just until they are lightly toasted and golden brown at the edges, 2–3 minutes. (If you like your coconut more brown/toasted, then do it! I prefer just a kiss of toasting, but that's personal preference.) Cool completely.
12. To finish the cake, spread the remaining frosting all over the sides and top of the cake. I want you to do the best you can, but also know you're about to cover it all up with coconut, so don't be too hard on yourself if it doesn't look incredible. Pat the coconut onto the sides of the cake until evenly covered, using the rest to sprinkle on top.

DO AHEAD: The cakes themselves can be baked 2 days ahead, tightly wrapped in plastic, and stored at room temperature (or 3 days refrigerated). Frosted, the cake will last upwards of 5 days (I keep mine at room temperature, but a cold coconut cake is a thing of beauty).