

Sticky Apple Cake

Serves 6–8

This cake can best be described as a sticky toffee pudding meets vanilla birthday cake meets apple pie meets a pancake with apples on top. It's a soft cake without much texture (you bake it until the apples fall apart and become jammy), which is usually something I'm against but here, I'm actively seeking that custardy, soaked cake energy.

½ cup unsalted butter (1 stick)

½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise, seeds scraped (or 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract)

Non-stick spray (optional)

⅔ cup light brown sugar, divided

2 large, unpeeled apples, cored and sliced (not too thin- you want some texture here)

1 ¼ cup all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon kosher salt

2 large eggs

¾ cup buttermilk

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Melt the butter in a small pot over medium-high heat. Cook, stirring or whisking occasionally until the butter starts to brown and foam, 2 to 3 minutes. It should smell like toasted nuts and be the color of caramel; add the vanilla bean if you're using it and remove the pot from heat to cool.
2. Spray an 8"–9" cake pan (springform or regular), pie plate, 1.5qt baking dish, etc. with non-stick spray (you can use softened butter to grease, too). If you are less confident in your upside-down cake flipping skills, line the cake pan with parchment (leaving some hanging out of the pan for easy lifting after).
3. Scatter half the brown sugar (⅓ cup) on the bottom of the cake pan and top with sliced apples; set aside.
4. Whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, salt, and remaining ⅓ cup brown sugar together in a medium bowl.
5. Whisk eggs and buttermilk together in a small bowl (or, just add the eggs to the measuring cup you've measured the buttermilk in and whisk in there). Add the vanilla extract, if using. Add buttermilk mixture to the dry ingredients, mixing just to blend. (Don't overmix here, or the cake will become tight and tough.)
6. Remove the vanilla bean if it's in the butter. Whisk in the vanilla-y browned butter until the batter is smooth and streak-free. (Again, don't overmix it, just until everything is well blended.)
7. Pour batter over the apples, smooth the top (although the batter is pretty viscous, almost like pancake batter and should smooth itself), and bake until cake is golden brown on top, pulls away from the sides of the pan, and springs back lightly when pressed in the center, 25–30 minutes.
8. Almost immediately (but without rushing or panicking), place a plate on top of the cake pan. With a towel under the pan, flip it over (this isn't as scary as you think it might be, I swear) and remove. Alternatively, if you've got parchment under it, lift the cake up and out of the pan and uh, flip it onto a plate. I can't honestly tell which method might feel more complicated to you but wanted to give two options to decide for yourself.