

Brown Butter Carrot Cake From "BraveTart" Recipe

STELLA PARKS

To highlight the earthy sweetness of carrots and pecans, my carrot cake starts with brown butter. Its toasty flavor complements the graham-y flavor of whole wheat flour, which absorbs water from the carrots to keep this cake fluffy and light.

This is a perennial birthday request in my family, so I generally toast the nuts, shred the carrots, brown the butter, and prepare the [Cream Cheese Buttercream](#) a day in advance. Having these tasks out of the way helps me pull the batter together in a flash, letting me focus on what I love most—decorating the cake with a colorful bouquet of [Twisted Carrot Roses](#).

Reprinted from *BraveTart: Iconic American Desserts* with permission from W. W. Norton.



Why It Works

- Time-consuming prep can be done several days in advance to speed assembly.
- Brown butter has the same richness as oil, but with a toasty flavor that complements earthy carrots.
- Whole wheat flour helps the cake bake up fluffy and light, despite its high moisture content.

YIELD: Serves 16

ACTIVE TIME: 1 hour

TOTAL TIME: 3 hours

Ingredients

For the Cake:

14 ounces pecan pieces (3 1/2 cups; 395g)

2 pounds whole, unpeeled carrots (from one 2-pound bag; 910g)

16 ounces unsalted butter (4 sticks; 450g)

14 ounces white sugar (2 cups; 395g)

8 ounces light brown sugar (1 cup, gently packed; 225g)

4 teaspoons ground cinnamon

4 teaspoons ground ginger

Directions

1. **Getting Ready:** To better synchronize the downtime in both recipes, prepare the [Cream Cheese Buttercream](#) before the cake. Adjust oven rack to the middle position and preheat to 350°F (180°C). Toast the pecans on a baking sheet until golden brown, about 10 minutes, and cool completely. Meanwhile, peel, trim, and shred the carrots, then measure out 24 ounces (6 cups, firmly packed). This can be refrigerated up to 1 week in a zip-top bag.
2. In a 2-quart stainless steel saucier, completely melt the butter over medium-low heat. Increase to medium and simmer, stirring with a heat-resistant spatula while the butter hisses and pops. Continue cooking and stirring, scraping up any brown bits that form along the pan, until the butter is golden-yellow and perfectly silent. Pour into a heat-safe measuring cup, along with all the toasty brown bits, and proceed as directed, or cover and refrigerate up to 1 week; melt before using.
3. **For the Cake:** Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and preheat to 350°F (180°C). Lightly grease three 8-inch anodized aluminum

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 3/4 teaspoons (7g) Diamond Crystal kosher salt; for table salt, use about half as much by volume or the same weight

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon grated nutmeg

3/4 teaspoon ground cloves

1/2 ounce vanilla extract (1 tablespoon; 15g)

6 large eggs, straight from the fridge

11 ounces all-purpose flour, such as Gold Medal (2 1/2 cups, spooned; 310g)

5 ounces whole wheat flour, not stone-ground (1 cup; 140g)

To Finish:

1 recipe [Cream Cheese Buttercream](#)

1 recipe [Twisted Carrot Roses](#), optional

cake pans and line with parchment (explanation and tutorial [here](#)). If you don't have three pans, it's okay to bake the cakes in stages; the batter will keep at room temperature until needed.

4. Combine white sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, baking powder, salt, baking soda, nutmeg, cloves, vanilla, and eggs in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Mix on low to moisten, then increase to medium and whip until thick and fluffy, about 8 minutes. Meanwhile, whisk together all-purpose and whole wheat flours. Drizzle in the brown butter in a steady stream, then reduce speed to low and add the flours. Once smooth, fold in shredded carrots and pecans with a flexible spatula.
5. Divide batter between the prepared cake pans, about 33 ounces each. If you don't have three pans, the remaining batter can be held at room temperature up to 3 hours. Bake until cakes are golden, about 45 minutes. A toothpick inserted into the center will have a few crumbs still attached, and your fingertip will leave a slight indentation in the puffy crust.
6. Cool cakes directly in their pans for 1 hour, then run a butter knife around the edges to loosen. Invert onto a wire rack, peel off the parchment, and return cakes right side up (covered in plastic, the cakes can be left at room temperature for a few hours). Prepare the buttercream.
7. **For the Crumb Coat:** Level cakes with a serrated knife (full directions [here](#)) and set the scraps aside for snacking. Place one layer on a heavy cast iron turntable. If you like, a waxed cardboard cake round can first be placed underneath, secured to the turntable with a scrap of damp paper towel. Top with exactly 1 cup buttercream, using an offset spatula to spread it evenly from edge to edge. Repeat with the second and third layers, then cover the sides of the cake with another cup of buttercream, spreading it as smoothly as you can (tutorial [here](#)). Refrigerate cake until the buttercream hardens, about 30 minutes.
8. Re-whip remaining buttercream to restore its creamy consistency, then use to decorate the chilled cake as desired; finish with Twisted Carrot Roses (optional). Let the cake return to cool room temperature before serving. Under a cake dome or an inverted pot, the frosted cake and carrot roses will keep 24 hours at cool room

temperature. After cutting, wrap leftover slices individually and store at cool room temperature up to 2 days more.

Special Equipment

Stand mixer, flexible spatula, 2 or 3 **8-inch anodized aluminum cake pans** (preferably 3 inches deep), **serrated knife**, **offset spatula**, **cast iron turntable**

Notes

When allowed to cool below 80°F (27°C), the brown butter may thicken the batter. While strange to see, this will not change how the batter is handled or baked. Brown butter hotter than 110°F (43°C) will, conversely, thin the batter, yet produce an otherwise identical cake.

Make-Ahead and Storage

Under a cake dome or an inverted pot, the frosted cake and carrot roses will keep 24 hours at cool room temperature. After cutting, wrap leftover slices individually and store at cool room temperature up to 2 days more.