How to make
Perfect Cheesecake

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How to make **Perfect Cheesecake**

Although the ingredients for making a homemade cheesecake are pretty simple, a lot can go wrong. As a professionally trained chef and cookbook author, I love to figure out how and why a recipe works. I think that’s the best way to master it and begin to tweak and customize your favorite recipes to really make them your own.

Keep reading to learn more about making perfect cheesecakes!

-Tessa from handletheheat.com
The **Springform Pan**

Cheesecakes are traditionally baked in a springform pan, which is a deep pan with a removable bottom. This makes easy work of removing the cheesecake from the pan and cutting beautiful slices. I do not recommend using any other pan. I typically use this Nordic Ware 10-cup springform pan. It’s best to handwash these pans to preserve their nonstick surface and spring mechanism.

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The **Crust**

The crust is probably the simplest part of any cheesecake. It’s typically comprised of finely ground graham crackers and melted butter. If you don’t have a food processor to grind the crackers, place them in a ziptop bag and use a mallet or rolling pin to grind them up. Or you can always buy prepared graham cracker crumbs.

Here’s the measurement breakdown for the crumbs needed for an average 9-inch cheesecake:

1 3/4 cups fine graham cracker crumbs = about 15 whole graham crackers = 230 grams = 8 ounces

Since the crust is so simple, feel free to use the same amount of any other crumbs, such as gingersnaps, chocolate wafers, Speculoos cookies, or vanilla wafers! Use digestive biscuits if you can’t get graham crackers.

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The **Cream Cheese**

Cheesecake is supposed to be an indulgence, so don’t skimp here. Use full fat cream cheese to get the best taste and texture. Make sure your cream cheese is at room temperature so it blends smoothly with no lumps.

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Making the **Cheesecake**

When it comes down to making the cheesecake itself, you will need an electric mixer. It can be a stand mixer or hand-held one, but the power of that motor will help ensure the cheesecake is smooth and creamy. Blending by hand just doesn’t cut it.

**Overbeating**

One of the absolute KEYS to making perfect cheesecake is to blend the cream cheese and sugar to oblivion, but once the eggs are added only blending until incorporated. We can beat the cream cheese as much as we need to ensure it’s smooth, but if you overbeat the batter once the eggs are added then you run the risk of causing all sorts of problems, like large cracks on the cheesecake surface.
What about cracks?

Now that I've mentioned those darn cracks, let's talk more about them. Generally, there are 3 causes of cheesecake cracks:

- Overbeating
- Overcooking
- Quick temperature changes

Quick temperature changes can be caused by opening the oven door too often or cooling the cheesecake down too quickly. You want gentle and slow heat.

To prevent the cheesecake from cracking as it cools, run a thin knife around the edge of the cake as soon as it comes out of the oven. Only after chilling should you remove the springform ring.

What do I do if my cheesecake has cracks?

Sometimes it just happens, even if you take every precaution against them. That's when cheesecake toppings come in handy:

- Fresh fruit
- Ganache
- Berry puree or compote
- Whipped cream
- Sour cream
- Caramel sauce
- Butterscotch sauce

Do I need to use a water bath?

A water bath helps to create that gentle moderated cooking environment which prevents cracks. The downside to water baths is that they're messy and it's easy for the water to leak into your pan and create a soggy cheesecake crust. To avoid this, make sure you're using a quality 'leakproof' pan and wrapping it at least 3 times in heavy-duty aluminum foil. See the recipe for specific instructions.

When is the cheesecake done or set?

Overbaking a cheesecake can cause cracks, an unappealing texture, and even a burnt crust. It can be difficult to tell when a cheesecake is done baking or when it's 'set' properly.

Here's my rule of thumb: the cheesecake is done when it's dry to the touch and the edges are slightly puffed. The very middle may jiggle or look a little wobbly, but that's perfectly okay.

Why? Well, in the kitchen there's an important concept called 'carryover cooking.' It basically means that even when you remove any food from a heat source (like the oven, stove, or grill)—the residual heat will continue to cook the food. The larger the food product, the more carryover cooking there will be.

So with a large item like a whole cheesecake, it's best to err on the side of under-baking because it will continue to cook and solidify as it cools. It will continue to firm up as it chills in the fridge.
Chilling
As I mentioned above, any quick temperature changes can cause the cheesecake to develop cracks. This is why many recipes (including mine just below) will actually have you cool the cheesecake inside the oven so the heat dissipates slowly and steadily.

Whatever you do, you want to be sure you’ve cooled the cheesecake completely to room temperature before placing inside the fridge. It needs to chill for at least 4 hours, but preferably overnight.

If you don’t chill enough, the texture will be loose, possibly even too loose to cut and hold its shape neatly.

Serving
Aka the best part! :)

If time permits, let the cheesecake sit at room temperature for 30 minutes before serving for best taste and texture.

If your cheesecake looks like it might stick to the sides of the pan, run the blunt end of a knife along the edges. If it still looks like it’ll stick, use a hair dryer to heat the sides of the pan to release. Open the springform latch and gently remove the sides.

Whether you serve the cheesecake directly on the springform bottom or remove it to a platter or cake stand is completely up to you. It’s definitely not as pretty to serve on the pan bottom, and if you have a nonstick-coated pan, your knife will scratch and damage the nonstick coating. On the other hand, moving the entire cheesecake can be a little stressful, especially if it’s stuck at all.

Use a fairly big sharp knife like this one to cut slices. Run the knife under hot water and wipe off the blade between each slice so they’re clean and pretty. Then slide a metal server underneath the graham cracker crust to ensure it doesn’t crumble.

How to store & make ahead

Fridge
Store the cheesecake uncovered to avoid creating condensation, which will create a mushy texture. In general, cheesecakes can be stored in the fridge for up to 3 days.

Freezer
You can place a whole cheesecake or individual slices on a baking sheet inside the freezer until firm. Wrap the cheesecake or each individual slice in plastic wrap and place in a freezer bag. Freeze for up to 2 months.

To serve, defrost a whole cheesecake in the fridge overnight. You can also defrost individual slices in the fridge overnight, or at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Now let’s move on to my Ultimate Cheesecake Recipe! This is a classic cheesecake, but once you’ve mastered it feel free to experiment with flavors and add-ins. I’ve also included some of my other favorite recipes after this.
Ultimate Cheesecake Recipe

For the crust:
1 3/4 cups (230 grams) graham crackers crumbs (about 15 whole graham crackers)
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

For the filling:
2 pounds (907 grams) cream cheese, at room temperature
1 1/4 cups (250 grams) granulated sugar
1/2 cup (130 grams) sour cream
1 lemon, zested
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 large eggs
Boiling water, for the water bath

For the topping:
12 ounces (340 grams) fresh raspberries
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

Prepare a 9-inch springform pan for a water bath. Place a large square of heavy duty aluminum foil underneath the pan. Gently fold the edges up and around the pan. Repeat twice so there’s three sheets of foil to ensure a waterproof seal. Gently fold the top of the foil around the edge of the pan.

Make the crust:
In a medium bowl, combine the graham cracker crumbs, cinnamon, and butter until the mixture is moistened. Press into the bottom and halfway up the sides of a 9-inch nonstick springform pan. Bake for 10 minutes. Place on a wire rack to cool. Maintain oven temperature.

Make the filling:
In a large bowl, use an electric mixer to beat the cream cheese on medium speed until completely smooth and free of lumps. Add the sugar and beat until combined. Add in the sour cream, lemon zest, and vanilla. Add the eggs, one at a time, and beat until just combined. Be careful not to overmix.

Pour the batter into the foiled-wrapped springform pan. Place the pan in a large roasting pan. Pour boiling water into the roasting pan until the water is about halfway up the sides of the cheesecake pan. Bake at 325°F for 1 1/2 hours, or until set and the top looks slightly dry. If the middle is slightly wobbly, that’s fine. Err on the side of underbaking rather than overbaking.

Turn off the oven heat and crack the oven door open just by 1-inch. Let the cheesecake cool inside the oven for 1 hour.

Remove the cheesecake from the oven and from the water bath, unwrap the foil, and transfer it to a cooling rack. Run a thin-bladed knife around the edge of the cake to make sure it’s not sticking to the sides (which can cause cracks as it cools). Let the cheesecake cool completely on the rack.

Refrigerate until completely chilled, at least 4 hours or up to 3 days. Store the cheesecake uncovered to avoid creating condensation, which will create a mushy texture.

Make the topping:
In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine the filling ingredients. Heat, stirring and breaking up the raspberries often, until the raspberries release their juices and begin to form a sauce, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and press through a fine mesh strainer into a small bowl to remove the seeds. Let cool completely. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour before using.

Release the cheesecake from the pan onto a cake stand or serving plate and top with the raspberry sauce. Serve.
Did you like this Cheesecake Guide?

Here are some of my favorite recipes from Handle the Heat. Be sure to check them out:

- Peanut Butter Cup Cheesecake
- Nutella Cheesecake
- Oreo Truffle Cheesecake
- No-Bake S'mores Mini Cheesecakes
- No-Bake Strawberry Lemonade Mini Cheesecakes
- Mini Bananas Foster Cheesecakes
- Mini Turtle Cheesecakes
- Crème Brûlée Cheesecake Bars
- Raspberry Lemonade Cheesecake Bars

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