

Mollie Katzen's Ukrainian Poppy Seed Cake

Mollie's recipe makes a lovely cake, perfect for tea or a light dessert. And like any rich cake, if you wrap it and let it rest for a day, it improves in texture and flavor. My recipe is a little different than the original Moosewood recipe. I used 1/2 cup poppy seeds because that's how many I had—and it was plenty. I ran out of brown sugar, so I used a mixture of white and brown. And I reduced the baking powder to 2 teaspoons and increased the lemon zest to a rounded teaspoon. It could even hold more. Plus, in haste, I didn't let the milk and poppy seeds soak overnight as Mollie had instructed. I baked the cake in my two loaf pans that are about 7 1/2 inches in length, as Mollie advised medium pans. But I think you could use two 8-inch square pans or even a 13-by 9-inch pan and cut the baked cake into squares.

Makes 2 loaves, about 12 to 16 servings

1 cup whole milk

1/2 to 3/4 cup poppy seeds

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 1/3 cups sugar (light brown or white or a mixture of both)

3 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 cups unbleached flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

1 full teaspoon grated lemon zest

1/2 teaspoon salt

1. An hour before you plan to bake the cake, place the milk in a small saucepan and stir in the poppy seeds. Bring to nearly a boil over medium heat, and then remove the pan from the heat. Let the milk and poppy seeds come to room temperature.
2. When ready to bake, place a rack in the center of the oven, and preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour two 7 1/2-inch loaf pans with butter and dust with flour. Set aside.
3. Place the butter in a large mixing bowl, and beat on medium speed until creamy. Add the sugar and beat until creamy in texture, about 1 to 2 minutes. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Fold in the vanilla.
4. Meanwhile, place the flour, baking powder, lemon zest, and salt, in a small bowl, and sift to combine. Add 1/2 cup of the dry ingredients to the butter-sugar mixture, and blend on low until just combined. Add about 1/4 cup of the milk and poppy seed mixture. Blend until combined. Continue adding the dry and wet ingredients on low

speed until combined, ending with the dry ingredients. Divide the batter between the two pans, smooth the top with a spatula, and place in the oven. Bake until the cake tests done, is lightly browned, about 45 to 50 minutes. Remove the loaves from the oven, let cool on a rack 15 minutes, then run a knife around the edges and turn out to cool right-side up for 30 minutes before slicing.