Nashville Sour Cream Coffee Cake

This recipe can be baked in a 9-inch loaf or a 9-inch square pan, whatever your preference. We've always baked it as a loaf, but I can see the upside to either. Count on about 30 minutes for the square pan, but about 55 minutes to an hour of baking time for the loaf. Like I mentioned above, this recipe is made for tweaking because you can add the nuts you have on hand, spices you like, and use the flour that's in the house. The original recipe used a teaspoon of lemon juice and baking soda, which through the years I have omitted. And as I said, the original had more sugar than I use - 1/2 cup sugar and nuts in the topping. I think 1/3 cup is plenty, but suit yourself! This recipe freezes well, and it's a really nice gift if you need to take something to a friend.

Makes 1 loaf

Vegetable oil spray, for misting the pan

Topping:

1/3 cup sugar

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground cardamom, optional

1/3 cup finely chopped pecans or pistachios

Cake:

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 cup sugar

2 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder

1/2 teaspoon kosher or sea salt (use 1/4 teaspoon if using table salt)

1 cup sour cream

1. Place a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly mist a 9-inch loaf or square pan.
2. For the topping, stir together the sugar, cinnamon, cardamom, if using, and nuts in a small bowl. Scatter about 1 tablespoon of the mixture over the bottom of the pan. Set aside.

3. For the cake, place the butter and sugar in a large mixing bowl, and using an electric mixer, beat on medium until fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, and then the vanilla, and beat until smooth.
4. Place the flour, baking powder, and salt in a small bowl and stir to combine. Add the dry ingredients to the butter mixture alternatively with the sour cream, beating on low until smooth and incorporated.
5. Spread a third of the batter into the pan. Scatter a third of the topping over the top. Add another third of the batter, spreading it until smooth. Add another third of the topping. Spread the remaining batter on top, scattering the last of the topping on top. Place the pan in the oven.
6. Bake until lightly browned, and the cake tests done, about 55 minutes to 1 hour for a loaf, and about 30 minutes for the square pan.