

Creamy Cherry Cheesecake



A tall cheesecake asks you to stop before its centre looks completely still. Gentle mixing, a real water bath and patient cooling all support the same aim: a smooth slice rather than a swollen, cracked cake. The cherry topping is cooked separately and added cold, so its glossy fruit does not soften the chilled filling.

MAKES 12-14 slices

ACTIVE 45 minutes

WAIT 45 minutes in switched-off oven, 45-60 minutes on rack and at least 6 hours refrigeration

PAN / EQUIPMENT 23 cm / 9-inch springform pan, at least 7.5 cm / 3 inches high; larger roasting tin

LEVEL Intermediate

COOK 8 minutes for base; 60-85 minutes for filling; 8-12 minutes for sauce

OVEN 175°C / 350°F throughout baking; conventional

Ingredients

Crumb base

- 150 g finely crushed graham crackers
- 85 g unsalted butter, melted
- 13 g caster sugar

Cheesecake filling

- 1,020 g full-fat block-style cream cheese, softened
- 250 g caster sugar
- 6 large eggs, about 300 g without shells
- 60 g sour cream
- 7.5 mL vanilla extract

Sweet cherry sauce

- 600 g pitted sweet cherries, fresh
- 80 mL water
- 10 g cornflour/cornstarch
- 30 g caster sugar
- 15 mL lemon juice

Method

01 Prepare a watertight baking setup

Heat the oven to 175°C / 350°F. Line the springform base with a circle of baking paper. Wrap the outside in two large, unbroken sheets of heavy-duty foil, bringing the foil well up the sides. Place the empty wrapped pan inside the roasting tin to check that it fits with room around it. Use a deep pan with the stated height; do not fill a shallow substitute to its rim.

02 Bake and cool the base

Mix cracker crumbs, melted butter and 13 g sugar until evenly damp. Press into a level layer across the bottom of the springform pan. Bake for 8 minutes, then let cool while preparing the filling. Keep the oven at the same temperature.

03 Smooth the cheese before adding eggs

Mix the softened cream cheese and 250 g sugar at low speed until smooth. Stop and scrape the bowl, paddle and bottom several times. The mixture should have no firm cheese lumps before anything else is added. Scraping is more useful than increasing the speed.

04 Add the remaining filling ingredients

Beat the eggs lightly in a jug and add them in six portions on low speed, mixing only until each disappears. Add sour cream and vanilla. Finish with a spatula, scraping the bottom to check for thicker cheese. Pour onto the cooled base. Leave at least 1 cm / $\frac{3}{8}$ inch below the rim; if your pan cannot accommodate the filling, bake the excess separately in a small ramekin rather than overfilling.

05 Create the water bath

Set the roasting tin with the filled pan on the oven shelf. Pour freshly boiled water carefully into the roasting tin until it reaches about halfway up the springform pan, approximately 3-4 cm deep. Keep water below the foil edge and out of the filling. Slide the shelf back gently.

06 Bake until the middle trembles

Bake for 60-85 minutes. Begin checking at 60 minutes without shaking the pan forcefully. The outer area should look set; only the central 5-7 cm / 2-3 inches should tremble softly. It must not ripple like an uncooked liquid. If it needs longer, check in 5-minute intervals. Do not use a fully dry skewer as the endpoint for this cheesecake.

07 Cool in stages

Switch off the oven and leave the door partly open for 45 minutes. Remove the cheesecake from the water bath carefully, peel off the foil and place on a rack. After another 45-60 minutes, refrigerate the cake in its pan; do not leave it out for an extended period waiting to feel completely cold. Refrigerate uncovered at first, then cover once chilled. Allow at least 6 hours, preferably overnight, before releasing the ring.

08 Cook the cherry sauce

Whisk water, cornflour, sugar and lemon juice in a cold saucepan. Warm while stirring until the liquid begins to thicken. Add the cherries and simmer gently for about 8-12 minutes, stirring until the fruit is tender and thick bubbles rise across the sauce. Transfer to a shallow container, cool briefly and refrigerate within 2 hours. The sauce must be cold before topping the cake.

09 Release and serve

Run a thin knife around the cold cheesecake if necessary, then release the ring. Move it on its base to a serving plate. Spoon some cold cherry sauce over the top and serve the remainder alongside. Dip a long knife in hot water, wipe it dry and cut cleanly; repeat for each slice.

THE DETAIL THAT MATTERS / A GENTLE WOBBLE IS THE FINISHING SIGNAL

Cheesecake is an egg-set filling, not a sponge. Its centre is the last part to firm, and it continues changing during the gradual cooling and long chill. Look for a stable outer ring and a small central area that trembles together when the pan is nudged. A wave travelling across most of the surface means more baking; complete rigidity can mean the cake has gone too far. Use the visible movement together with the stated time range and pan size. A topping can hide a crack, but it cannot turn an overbaked filling back into a creamy one.

What to look for

- Cream cheese is smooth before eggs are added.
- Water surrounds the actual baking pan; a bowl on another shelf is not this method.
- Only the central 5-7 cm trembles at the end of baking.
- Cake and cherry sauce are cold before assembly.

Plan a day ahead

Bake the cheesecake the day before serving and prepare the sauce while the cake cools. Refrigerate each separately overnight. On serving day, remove the ring while the cake is cold and add the sauce close to presentation. This schedule gives the filling time to become sliceable without asking you to judge a warm cheesecake by its final texture. Active work is much shorter than total waiting time, but the waiting is part of the recipe.

Keep this oven protocol consistent

The oven stays at 175°C / 350°F for the base and filling in this version. Do not add an initial very hot stage from another cheesecake recipe, then return to these times. Different protocols are complete systems: their temperatures, depth of filling and expected cooking time work together. The roasting tin also changes how heat reaches the sides. Use the same pan dimensions for your first attempt so there is only one set of conditions to evaluate.

If it goes differently

Small cheese lumps remain. The cheese was too cold or the bowl was not scraped early. Smooth the cheese before adding eggs; do not try to remove lumps by whipping the completed filling at high speed.

The crust is wet underneath. Water entered through the springform seam. Check foil for tears before the next bake; use broad continuous sheets that rise above the waterline.

A large crack opens. Excess air, overbaking or abrupt cooling stressed the filling. Serve cold with sauce and review mixing speed, centre movement and cooling stages.

Keep and serve

Keep covered at 4°C / 40°F or below for up to 3 days. Store sauce separately when possible. Freeze unsauced slices for up to 1 month and thaw overnight in the refrigerator.

A small variation

Serve plain with fresh berries on the side instead of cherry sauce. Keep the filling and baking protocol unchanged.

For your next bake

Before switching off the oven, observe which part of the surface moves. After the overnight chill, cut through that same central area and compare its finished texture with the firmer outer edge.

THE FOUNDATIONS / L06

Butter: feel the consistency

Room temperature is too vague to be a reliable instruction.

Soft, cool and plastic

For creaming, butter should accept a shallow finger indentation while keeping its shape. It should not look oily or collapse into a puddle. Cut a cold block into smaller pieces to soften more evenly. If it becomes greasy, chill briefly and reassess rather than adding flour to compensate.

Cold for pastry

For flaky pastry, distinct cool pieces of butter help create layers as the dough bakes. Keep the pieces visible at the end of rubbing or cutting in. For a sandy sweet pastry, a finer distribution may be intentional. Follow the recipe's texture target instead of using one universal pastry technique.

Melted is a separate state

Melted butter changes how air enters a mixture. Let it cool as directed before combining with eggs or chocolate. Microwaving until part of a block melts does not create evenly softened butter. If melting happens during preparation for a creamed cake, cool and restore a workable consistency before proceeding.

THE CHECKPOINT

Unsalted butter makes salt easier to control. If using salted butter, its salt content varies; do not guess an identical deduction for every brand.

Try this

Press a spoon into cold, correctly softened and nearly melted butter. Learn the three textures visually before your next creamed cake.

DIAGNOSIS / D01

The Cake Sank in the Middle

Separate a structure problem from a cake that simply needed longer.

Read the timing first

Did the centre fall while the cake was still baking, immediately after removal, or only after handling? Photograph the surface before covering it. A shallow, even settling in a flourless chocolate cake may be intentional; a deep hollow in a vanilla layer cake is a different symptom. Compare the result with the intended cake style before trying to eliminate every dip.

Inspect a cooled slice

A wet, glossy central band suggests incomplete baking, especially when the outside is already coloured. An otherwise cooked cake with large irregular holes may point toward unstable aeration or a measuring error. A heavy strip along the bottom can also arise from uneven mixing. None of these clues proves a cause alone. Record the crumb and the baking history together instead of treating the hollow as a diagnosis.

Decide what this batch can become

If the cake is still in the oven and clearly unset, continue the original bake, protecting an already dark top as appropriate for the recipe. Once a cooled cake reveals raw batter, do not conceal it with filling or turn it into cake pops. A fully cooked but uneven cake can be levelled or served in small dessert portions; its lost volume cannot be restored by frosting.