

Maryland's Official State Dessert Smith Island Cake

How the Culinary Tradition Got Started

Nobody is quite sure who first developed the concept of the Smith Island Cake, though some believe it was started as a variation on an English Torte. Frances Kitching, whose recipes comprise the island's official cookbook, is often given credit. An excerpt of an interview from the Crisfield – Smith Island Alliance newsletter has this to say about it:



“When we asked about the origin of the famous, multi-layered Smith Island Cakes, she (Kitching) responded, ‘Well, I don’t know who made the first one ... I could’ve very well been. I don’t know ... but my kids loved the icing as well as they did the cake ... ’ So it seems that those fabulous, thin-layered cakes may well have evolved to satisfy the craving of children (and maybe a few grown-ups too!) for more of that sweet, tasty icing.”

Smith Island Cake is a confection that consists of many (usually between eight to twelve) thin layers of cake separated by an equal number of layers of sweet icing. The traditional cake is yellow with chocolate icing, but many bakers have branched out and now

specialize in such flavors as banana, orange, and coconut.

The cake is a favorite at family gatherings and social events on Smith Island. It has become such a part of the island's culture that the visitor center on Ewell features a display of cake pans used to make this special dessert – and a video of Mrs. Kitching assembling one of her masterpieces.

Visitors to the area who are lucky enough to sample Smith Island Cake won't soon forget it. In fact, a popular souvenir of a trip to Somerset County is a copy of Mrs. Kitching's cookbook – which, of course, includes a recipe for the island's beloved cake.

The cake found its way to the mainland and beyond. In 2008, an effort to make the cake Maryland's Official Dessert began. Delegate Page Elmore and Senator J. Lowell Stoltzfus, wrote and sponsored bills in their respective houses of the Maryland General Assembly. In April of that year, it was signed into law with an effective date of October 1, 2008. Smith Island-style layer cakes are now available from bakeries and restaurants throughout the region.

You can make plans to visit Smith Island. Cruise boats depart daily Memorial Day Weekend through mid-October. Visit the museum, Smith Island Center, and learn about the history, culture, and heart of this small, watermen's Community, where islanders have lived, worked, and worshipped for over 300 years.

Sample List of Flavors

Traditional Chocolate	German Chocolate
Chocolate Walnut	Devil's Food
Chocolate Coconut	Lemon
Chocolate Raspberry	Red Velvet
Banana	Carrot
Banana Walnut	Pumpkin Spice
Blueberry	Spice
Orange	Key Lime
Mandarin Orange	Butterfinger®
Pineapple	Cookies'n' Cream®
Pineapple Banana	<i>In Season Only</i>
Pineapple Coconut	Strawberry
Coconut	Strawberry Banana
Wet Coconut	Peach
Peanut Butter	Fig
Peanut Butter Cup	Pumpkin
Pumpkin Spice	
Red Velvet	

Try the recipe...

Smith Island Ten-Layer Cake— Mrs. Kitching's Original Recipe

2 cups sugar
2 sticks unsalted butter, cut into chunks (1 cup)
5 eggs
3 cups flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 heaping teaspoon baking powder
1 cup evaporated milk
2 teaspoons vanilla
1/2 cup water

Cream together sugar and butter. Add eggs one at a time and beat until smooth. Sift together flour, salt, and baking powder. Mix into egg mixture one cup at a time. With mixer running, slowly pour in the evaporated milk, then the vanilla and water. Mix just until uniform.

Put three serving spoonfuls of batter in each of ten 9-inch lightly greased pans, using the back of the spoon to spread evenly. Bake three layers at a time on the middle rack of the oven at 350° for 8 minutes. A layer is done when you hold it near your ear and you don't hear it sizzle.

Start making the icing when the first layers go in the oven. Put the cake together as the layers are finished. Let layers cool a couple of minutes in the pans. Run a spatula around the edge of the pan and ease the layer out of the pan. Don't worry if it tears; no one will notice when the cake is finished. Use two and three serving spoonfuls of icing between each layer. Cover the top and sides of the cake with the rest of the icing. Push icing that runs onto the plate back onto the cake.

Chocolate Icing for Ten-Layer Cake

2 cups sugar
1 cup evaporated milk
5 ounces unsweetened chocolate
1 stick unsalted butter
1/2 to 1 teaspoon vanilla

Put sugar and evaporated milk in a medium pan. Cook and stir over medium-low heat until warm. Add chocolate and cook to melt. Add butter and melt. Cook over medium heat at a slow boil for 10 to 15 minutes. Stir occasionally. Add vanilla. Icing will be thin but thickens as it cools.

...or order one from an experienced bakery.

Bayside Inn Restaurant

4065 Smith Island Road
Ewell, MD 21824
410-425-2771
www.smithislandlayercakes.com

Johnnysweets

801 West Main Street
Crisfield, MD 21817
443-754-5582

Classic Cakes Bakery

1305 S. Division Street
Salisbury MD 21801
410-860-5300
www.classicsmithislandcakes.com

Cakes by David

745 S. Division Street
Salisbury MD 21804
410-742-1571
www.cakesbydavid.com

Diabetic friendly & gluten-free
versions available.

Smith Island Baking Company

45 West Chesapeake Avenue
Crisfield, MD 21817
410-425-2253 (CAKE)
www.smithislandbakingco.com

Smith Island Bakery

20926 Caleb Jones Road
Ewell, MD 21824
410-425-2018
www.smithislandbakeryllc.com

Customize Your Cake

You can add nuts (black walnuts or pecans are most common), seasonal fruit, candy bar pieces, cookies, jams or jellies to almost any cake, depending on the baker. Some vendors already offer unusual combinations such as Black and Red (Devil's Food and Red Velvet alternating layers), Checkered Cake, Neapolitan, and more. Most of these delicious cakes freeze well either whole, in sections or by the slice. Wrap well with wax paper, or plastic wrap, and aluminum foil.

Standard cake prices start at \$30 each and are subject to change. Some flavors, such as those with seasonal ingredients, can cost more and prices vary from baker to baker. Advance notice is required, so place your order as early as you can, especially during holidays.

Please inquire about shipping prices. Some bakers will ship internationally.