

Date and Walnut Cake with Caramel

For the cake:

175g (6oz) medjool pitted dates, chopped or other fresh soft dates
75g (3oz) unsalted butter, softened
175g (6oz) caster sugar or light muscovado sugar
½ tsp vanilla extract
3 large eggs
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
225g (8oz) self-raising flour, sifted
½ cup walnuts, ground, (or pecan nuts)

For the caramel:

100g (4oz) caster sugar
35g (1¼ oz) butter
½ tsp salt
50ml (2fl oz) double cream

For the topping:

dates halved lengthwise, and whole walnut pieces or pecan nuts
whipped fresh cream (optional)

You will need:

20cm (8in) spring-form cake tin
baking paper
1 tsp softened butter

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). Lightly grease the base and sides of the spring-form cake pan. Cut out a circle of baking paper and line the base. Cut a long strip to line the sides.

Make the cake: Place the dates in a bowl in 300ml (½ pt) of boiling water. Stir and set aside.

In the bowl of a free-standing electric mixer, beat the butter and sugar together with an electric whisk until light and fluffy. Beat in the vanilla extract and eggs one at a time, beating after each addition. Don't worry if it curdles, it'll come back together.

Add 1 tsp of bicarbonate of soda into the soaking liquid with the dates and stir briefly.

Add the flour and ground nuts and beat well. Remove the whisk. With a wooden spoon stir in the dates and soaking liquid. Pour the mixture into the tin (it'll be runny).

Bake in the middle of the oven for around 45 minutes or until a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean.

Make the caramel: Place the sugar in a non-stick, heavy-based pan and cook over a gentle heat for 5 to 8 minutes until you have a rich caramel. Remove from the heat and add the butter and salt, stirring constantly. Don't worry if it splits, keep stirring and it will come back together. Add the cream when the butter has melted, then stir until glossy. Transfer to a bowl.

Remove the cake from the oven and allow to cool a little in the tin before taking it out of the tin to cool completely.

Pipe with cream and decorate with the dates and walnuts (or pecans) (optional), or serve with whipped cream or choice of ice cream and warm caramel sauce.

THE CAKE will keep in the fridge for up to 3 days or the cake can be frozen for a month.