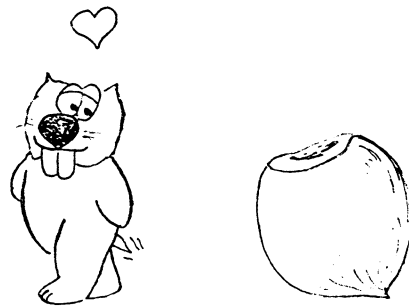


HAZELNUT CHEESECAKE (the best)

What? Another cheesecake? Haven't we had enough? Let's think about that. First of all we are terribly privileged on the world scene to even be able to consider that question. (Push the guilt buttons, bob.) Putting this thought conveniently aside, let's face real facts. We privileged folks quickly tire of the same old thing. Spoiled rotten and fickle to boot, you might say. And cheesecakes, like marriage in the divorce age, are no exception. This particular one arrives like a springtime romance, with the promise of longterm fidelity.



Cheesecake. We all know the risks. As rich as rich gets when done right. A sinful self-indulgent health hazard. Diet disaster. But hey, it's not a daily staple, just an occasional treat. So why all this fuss. Consume with a nearly clean conscience. And share the residual guilt by pushing it on your friends. But remember, thin slices. This one is the best. Don't ruin it by overdosing.

Background. A few Americans know of Frangelico, an imported Italian hazelnut liqueur we like to stick in cheesecakes. Fewer know of nutella[®], a somewhat sinful chocolate-hazelnut spread that is a popular junkfood staple in the Italian diet, available here in hard to find Italian markets or in food binge departments of overpriced stores like Bloomies. American tourists in Italy soon discover the universally available icecream flavor "nocciola" (hazelnut), yum. In fact the hazelnut seems to be the nut of choice there. American choice nuts are organized by the NRA. They're called gun nuts.

So let's get started:

CRUST: $\frac{1}{4}$ lb butter (1 stick \sim 120g in Europe)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cups finely ground crumbs from Nabisco 'Nilla Wafers
or your favorite brand vanilla wafers

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup ground toasted hazelnuts [recipe total: 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons]

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar

FILLING: 2 lbs cream cheese (4 8oz packages \sim 900g in Europe)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar (\sim 350g)

2 tablespoons Frangelico liqueur

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup ground toasted hazelnuts

pinch of salt

4 large eggs

TOPPING: 2 cups sour cream

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar

1 teaspoon Frangelico liqueur

2 tablespoons ground toasted hazelnuts

TIME: Leave about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours from start to finish. This can be considerably reduced by doing up the nuts ahead of time in a large quantity. Recipe ready hazelnuts cut the time by 40 minutes.

CRUST. Begin by roasting and skinning the hazelnuts as described in Hassling with Hazelnuts. Allow about 50 minutes for this stage. Preheating the oven about 10 minutes. Roasting about 20. Friction treatment about 10. Grinding about 5. Waiting time at the beginning can be used to crumb the cookies. Then leave the butter to melt over a minimum heat burner. This allows the crust ingredients to be mixed immediately when the nuts are ready. Packing and pressing the side walls (height about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches) - 5 minutes, maybe 10. Let's face it. One hour is already down the tubes. Use a 10 inch ungreased springform pan.

BATTER UP! The batter part is standard. Nudge the room temperature cream cheese around a bit with the sugar. (Stick it on the warm stove during the crust stage to soften if necessary.) Then go to electric beaters. When soft add everything but the eggs and blend until smooth. Then do the eggs one at a time at minimum beater speed to avoid screwing up the batter-to-air ratio. We usually hold the nuts till last and gently incorporate. Then pour into crust. Place in **preheated** 350° oven. (Re-pre-heated, to be technical. Don't forget this or you lose more time.)

BAKE OFF. 45 minutes, 50 if the cold stuff comes right out of the fridge. Go do something useful during this part. When the time is up, remove for 10 minutes. Ignore the jiggling center. Leave the oven on. Mix up the topping. After the full 10 minutes, spread over the top, sprinkle with hazelnuts, and reinsert in oven for another 10 minutes. Remove and place directly on a rack in the fridge. For a quick chill down, avoiding unpretty cracks.

WAIT. At least overnight. This helps the flavors relax. Take it from us. This one's worth waiting for.

CAUTION. No matter how many cheesecakes you may have done, there is always room for distraction. Check the recipe at each crucial step to see if you threw in all the right stuff. We almost forgot the eggs on this one during one test run. It seemed a little stiffer than usual but it was only the accidental egg sighting at the batter-dumping stage that saved us. The next time we remembered the sugar for the crust. After it was already pressed in place. We sprinkled a little around to compensate. Never panic. The guests will never know.

SERVING TIPS. If you take this to a large gathering of humans, don't let it out of your sight once the meal has started. Our first trial was inhaled while our backs were turned. Small consolation that all the guilty parties raved about it. Let it sit (stand?) at room temperature a little to soften it up before chowdown time. And make sure you really do do it the day before to intensify the flavor. (Doo doo?)

