

A Jiffy Recipe and the Novice Baker



Diane Nafranowicz would love to interview you about your OWS cooking: nafrano@umich.edu or 326 Mulholland, 48103

I love hearing from readers, but don't do so nearly enough. When I do receive feedback, it is often because I've touched on a personal memory or experience that a reader has shared. A review of my Chicago trip triggered a response from a Windy City native. A column about kitchen fumbles resonated with someone who recalled her first job struggling in a summer camp's kitchen. However, the responses that surprise me the most are from readers who don't try a recipe because it seems too complex. This information often comes in the form of "Oh, you finally published something that was easy enough for me to try."

For the novice cook, a packaged product may provide a boost of confidence in attempting something seen as risky. In reality, something like Jiffy Baking Mix contains very few ingredients and those ingredients are easily duplicated at home. It's true that I rarely use pre-made mixes in my cooking, but it's not true that you cannot begin with a packaged product, such as a Jiffy mix, and come up with something wonderful. Boxed mixes can create a shortcut, or feel like a shortcut. I feel no shame in acknowledging that I always keep a few boxes of cake mix in my pantry. These little "insurance policies" are great for cranking out some emergency cupcakes.

Two Jiffy products combine to make this month's featured recipe: Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix and Jiffy Golden Yellow Cake Mix. Jiffy products, and many packaged baking mixes for that matter, are quite economical. Another piece of feedback I've heard from the novice cook is that they are fearful of wasting expensive ingredients. Nobody likes a flop (and I've had my share), but in most baking trials, even an imperfect pan of brownies gets gobbled up in a nanosecond. If you are a novice baker, just don't make dessert for the boss as your first attempt at baking!

I've found Jiffy mixes to be surprisingly low priced. As I've noted in this month's cover article, buying local ingredients, limiting their product line, downsizing package volume, and doing no advertising helps to keep Jiffy's

costs low. Jiffy products are 'right sized'. As an example of this, a box of Jiffy cake mix yields 6-8 cupcakes, while a box of Duncan Heinz cake mix advises that it makes 24 cupcakes. The ingredients in this month's cake cost less than four dollars, making each serving about fifty cents. It's also economical with time: putting this cake together was a five-minute process.

Cornmeal Cake is based on the traditional Italian confection of a cornmeal cassata. Usually, polenta (coarsely ground corn meal) is used in combination with olive oil to make a cake which is simple in flavor, and has a slightly grainy texture from the roughness of the corn meal. Enhanced with anything from rosemary and honey to lemon zest, almonds, and candied fruits, these cakes are moist and delicious. Very different from a typical American cake, the Italian style dessert is dense and lightly sweet, but lacks frosting, layers, and an overly sugary taste. The fruit on the bottom can be switched out with fresh berries or canned fruit of your choice.

I'm told by my newbie cooking friends that flexibility in flavorings and ingredients can feel intimidating. What if I use almond extract instead of vanilla and it doesn't turn out? What if I choose fresh blueberries instead of raspberries; will the result be successful? Most recipe substitutions are offered to make the cook feel more in control, not less. If you don't have the pocketbook for fresh raspberries in April, try canned peaches. If you never stock Greek yogurt or crème fraiche, but have sour cream, try that. Not everything substitutes well: you'll experience a complete flop if you substitute no-fat "faux" margarine for butter. The recipes I create and publish, including this one, offer only substitutions which work well, and are designed to make your life easier. If you feel stressed about successful substitution and too many choices, I suggest that you make the recipe the first time using the recommended ingredients. Once you're happy with the results, experiment and personalize. My cake will then become your cake.

— Diane Nafranowicz



Peach Streusel Cornmeal Cake

- 1 9-oz box Jiffy Cornmeal Muffin Mix
- 1 9-oz box Jiffy Golden Yellow Cake Mix
- 1 Tbsp butter, melted
- 4 Tbsp brown sugar (divided)
- 2 15-oz cans sliced peaches
- 1 Tbsp juice/syrup from the canned peaches
- ¼ cup sour cream
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 Tbsp oil (corn, canola, vegetable or olive)
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place melted butter and 2 T brown sugar in the bottom of a 9" x 9" baking pan. Drain canned peaches and reserve 1 Tbsp of liquid for later use. Spread peaches evenly over the butter and sugar in the baking pan. In a large bowl, place box of cake mix and box of muffin mix. Combine with a spoon and then remove 1 cup of this dry mix and set aside for later use. To the dry mix remaining in the bowl, add sour cream, milk and the tablespoon of retained peach juice. Mix with a spoon for 2 minutes and then pour this batter

over the peaches. Some parts of the peaches may still remain visible under the batter. Into a small bowl, place the cup of retained dry mix. Add to this mix the oil, cinnamon, and remaining 2 T brown sugar. With a fork, blend this crumble; it will be dry and have a large crumb texture. This "streusel" mixture is then strewn on top of the batter in the baking dish. Bake for about 45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool for at least 20 minutes and cut into 8 pieces.