



Mini Maple Cheesecakes

YIELD: 12 mini cheesecakes

TIME: 1 hour, plus 8 hours cooling time

INGREDIENTS

Crust:

1 c (120 g) maple cookies (8 Trader Joe's maple leaf cookies)
2 tbsp (30 g) salted butter

Cheesecake:

10 oz (285 g) cream cheese at room temperature
 $\frac{1}{3}$ c (75 g) light brown sugar
3 tbsp (55 g) sour cream at room temperature
 $\frac{1}{3}$ c (90 g) heavy cream at room temperature
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp vanilla extract
 $\frac{1}{4}$ c maple syrup
2 eggs at room temperature

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F. Line a cupcake pan with wrappers.
2. If you're using maple cream filled cookies, scrape out the cream in the middle and set it aside to use in the cheesecake batter. Break up the cookies into large chunks and then process them in a food processor until they form panko breadcrumb-size crumbs.
3. Melt the butter in the microwave, then pour it into the crushed cookies and stir until totally combined and the mixture looks like wet sand. Place a little over 1 tbsp in each cupcake wrapper and pack it down firmly with your fingers.
4. Bake the crusts 8–10 minutes, until they're crisp and set and a little golden brown at the edges. Turn the oven temperature down to 250°F. Crack the door for a few minutes to cool it off.
5. Beat the cream cheese on medium speed in a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment until it's light and fluffy, just a few minutes. Add the brown sugar and maple cream filling (if using) then beat again for 1 or 2 minutes, scraping down the bowl as needed.
6. Add the sour cream and mix on low speed just until combined.
7. Add the heavy cream, vanilla extract, and maple syrup and mix on low speed just until combined.
8. Add the eggs and mix again on low just until all the ingredients are combined.
9. Scoop $\frac{1}{4}$ c batter into each cupcake wrapper. They will be quite full, but this is fine as long as the batter doesn't come above the edge of the wrapper.
10. Bake the cheesecakes for about 40 minutes. To check doneness, wiggle the pan. They shouldn't be liquidy at all in the middle, but there should be a little wobble to their centers, like the wobble of jello or pudding. If you want to be extra sure they're done, make sure the temperature reaches 160°F in the center of the cheesecakes.

11. Turn off the oven and leave the cheesecakes in the oven with the door cracked for 1 hour. After that, take them out of the oven and leave them on the counter for 1 more hour. After that, gently remove them from the pan, place them in an airtight container, and refrigerate them for about 6 hours to overnight to set them.
12. Top the cheesecakes with a drizzle of maple syrup right before serving. They might turn out so light and fluffy that everyone will want two! I ate two the first time I tried them, so keep that in mind if you're baking for a crowd.

NOTES AND TIPS

You can just use graham cracker crumbs instead of maple cookies for the crust. Just add 1 tbsp sugar and proceed to bake as normal. And leaving the maple cookie cream out of the cheesecake batter shouldn't affect them.

It is *very* important that your ingredients are at room temperature before you start baking. If they're cold, they might not emulsify well, or if they do emulsify, it will take much more whipping than usual, and this will cause your cheesecakes to be dense (a bit of a paradox, I know). Get them out of the fridge at least 1, but preferably 2 hours before you're going to bake.

Use regular, full-fat cream cheese, sour cream, and heavy cream. The point of dessert is to be delicious and good for your soul, not "healthy." Lower-fat versions could mess with the creamy texture of the cheesecake.

Use 100% pure maple syrup in this recipe, not the fake stuff. It just won't taste as good, and I don't know how it will affect the texture since I only tested with nice syrup.

Baking the crusts first at a higher temperature keeps them from getting soggy when you add the cheesecake batter.

Cooling the cheesecakes slowly in the oven and then on the counter keeps them creamy and from developing cracks in their tops.

The cheesecakes may not be quite set when you go to take them out of the pan. I pinched the edges of the wrapper on each side and lifted them straight up, and that helped get them out of the pan. If they're sticking to the bottom of the pan, that just means some butter from the crust leaked out and solidified as it cooled. It's not a problem; it just happens. Fix this by placing the cupcake pan inside a larger sheet pan and filling the sheet pan with a small amount of warm water. In half a minute, they should release from the bottom of the pan easily.

Cheesecakes always sink a little and shrink away from the edges of their pans, so these mini ones with form shallow divots on their tops and contract a bit as they cool. This is normal, and gives you a lovely spot for the maple syrup to pool in.

The syrup drizzle at the end is important. The cheesecakes do taste like maple on their own, but they're perfect with a little syrup on them at the end.