

Secret to Crack-Free Cheesecake



After much debate and discussion, trial and error, as well as a few tears shed, I believe, with the suggestions received from very helpful readers, I have found the answer to baking a [crack-free cheesecake](#). I've tried the [hot water bath](#) method with mixed results and quite frankly I don't think it's worth the extra effort. One of the suggestions sent to me worked quite well and I feel it is the answer to avoiding cracking during the cooling period in the oven:

1. Once the cheesecake is fully cooked (toothpick inserted in center comes out clean), turn off the oven
2. Slide the oven rack out so you can easily reach the cake
3. With a spatula carefully slide around rim of pan to loosen the cake from rim
4. Slide the rack back in oven, close the oven door, and let the cake cool for one hour before removing

By releasing the edges of the cake from the inside of the springform pan, the cake is then free to contract and is much less likely to crack in the process.

Fluffy Cheesecake Using a Water Bath



“To water bath or not to water bath, that is the question”

Some of my readers who baked my fluffy cheesecake using all the helpful suggestions have written to tell me that they had some problems while baking. The problem was usually the same one for all; they encountered cracking at the end of baking and during the cool down cycle. Well, I have also experienced that problem with either a small crack in the middle or several around the edges but never cracking completely through the cake.

When Aunt Mary passed down this family recipe to me, she did tell me that cracking can happen and it's something that never concerned her. Being the Martha Stewart of her day, she would say, “Just top it with powdered sugar or make a nice fruit glaze to cover the top”. Thus, that is what I have done. The cracking doesn't happen all the time but it can occur and I have tried to see how we bakers can avoid this problem. There are some helpful suggestions posted at the end of the original post on Fluffy Cheesecake so make sure to always read those before starting:

[Cheesecake Post Comments](#)

I have also done some research on water baths for baking methods and many chefs use a water bath when baking cheesecakes. However, none of their recipes were similar to mine so I was leery of trying the water bath method especially after one of my young cooks (age 10-13 competition) baked my cheesecake recipe and won first place in a baking contest. And she didn't use a water bath but just followed my instructions carefully!

Today I was determined to try the water bath method on my original recipe. I did not want to fuss with the foil method, so I devised an easier technique than the one in the link below:

[Cheesecake Baking Steps](#)

My Cheesecake Water Bath Method:

After preheating to a 320 degree oven, I placed a 9x6 loaf pan on the same rack I would use to bake the cheesecake. I boiled 4 cups of water and after placing the prepared cheesecake in the oven; I carefully filled the loaf pan with the hot water, closed the oven door and set the timer for 1 hour. It was completely cooked after 1 hour and I turned off the oven for another 1 hour, and remember **DON'T OPEN THE OVEN DOOR**. Follow the directions for cooling down in the original recipe.

PERFECTION, NO CRACKS!!

Aunt Mary would be very pleased with the final results and my using a water bath. Thanks again Aunt Mary for a fabulous recipe and good baking to all of you and enjoy a marvelous, fluffy cheesecake!

[Pumpkin Cheesecake Recipe](#)



November has arrived, which means the holidays are just around the corner! If you are like me, you probably are planning menus for those special dinners and are looking for some classic recipes. One classic recipe for the holidays is Pumpkin Pie, a tradition in many families.

However, coming from an Italian-American family we were not familiar with pumpkin pie for dessert. More likely we would serve pastries, cheesecake or cannoli. So when many of my readers asked for a pumpkin cheesecake recipe using my original Aunt Mary cheesecake formula, I was stuck.

When George and I moved to Texas, we became familiar with pumpkin pie (George's favorite) and learned from native Houstonians how to make a perfect pie. Not until a few years ago has pumpkin been introduced into cheesecake.

I have tried a few pumpkin cheesecakes in various restaurants and bakeries, but never would compare them to the light, fluffy type that I make. But the requests for using my recipe with pumpkin added was something I felt I needed to answer. Using suggestions I have received from others and with a few other changes, I was able to incorporate pumpkin into my family recipe while retaining the consistency, flavor, and texture of the original. I think the following recipe I have developed meets that standard.

For those that are not familiar with my original [fluffy cheesecake recipe](#), give it a look – it offers a printable recipe plus a video on preparation. Also, be sure to read the Helpful Suggestions posted at the end of the recipe for help in baking the perfect cheesecake.

Ingredients:

Have all ingredients at room temperature.

Crust:

- 9" springform pan
- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups graham cracker crumbs
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup melted butter
- 2 TBS. granulated sugar

Directions:

Preheat oven to 320 degrees

In springform pan, with fork stir graham cracker crumbs with melted butter and sugar until blended and moistened. With hand, press mixture onto bottom of pan. Set aside.



Filling:

- 2 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese – softened
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk
- 1 can (15 oz.) pumpkin (not pumpkin-pie mix)-preferably Libby's
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sour cream
- 6 eggs *separated* (whites in mixing bowl, set aside)
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup light or dark brown sugar
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. pumpkin pie spice
- 1 TBS. pure vanilla extract

1. In large bowl, with mixer at medium speed beat cream cheese with milk until smooth; slowly beat in sugar and brown sugar until blended, scraping bowl often with rubber spatula. Beat in pumpkin, sour cream, egg yolks, pumpkin pie spice and vanilla.



2. In separate bowl beat egg whites until stiff and stand in peaks. Carefully fold whites into mixture until well blended.



3. Pour mixture into prepared crust and bake for 1 hr 10 minutes or until center barely jiggles.



4. Turn off oven and let cheesecake sit for 1hr in oven. **Do not open oven door!**
5. Remove cheesecake from oven and set on wire rack. With thin knife, loosen cheesecake from side of pan. Cool cheesecake completely.



6. Do not remove rim and cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.
7. Remove side of pan to serve. Garnish with powdered sugar.

Happy Holidays to all! – Mary

Italian Tossed Salad – Mom's Way



My Mother made the best mixed tossed salad and so did my Mother-in-Law. In fact, all the Moms in my family made the same salad. Forget the bottled salad dressings, the mixing bowl and whisk, and the measuring of ingredients! They all would make their salads with a wonderful mixture of salad greens plus top quality extra virgin olive oil, red wine vinegar and toss in additional vegetables or meats to complete the dish.

Their salads would be so fresh and tasty and they never measured or whisked the liquids before adding to the salad. The salad was always made in a large salad bowl that would be passed around the table and as a child I always hoped there would be some left for me when the bowl came around. Everyone loved the salad and it would often be eaten alone or with the entrée.

In Mom's home you would never think of eating salad as a meal. However, today we love having salads for lunch or any time as our main meal. This recipe can be served either way, entrée or side, it all depends on how many ingredients you want to add to the mixture. Their tossing tools were their hands. Get ready for a wonderful salad that you will find easy to prepare. This is dedicated to my wonderful Mom and the world's best Grandma on Mother's Day!

Ingredients:

- Any salad greens, alone or a mixture: Romaine lettuce, iceberg lettuce, Bibb, chicory, arugula, or prepackaged salad greens

- Extra virgin olive oil
- Red wine vinegar
- Fresh lemon juice
- Salt
- Black pepper

Additions:

- Cucumbers
- Radishes
- Fresh tomatoes, sliced/cherry/grape
- Onions
- Fresh sliced button mushrooms
- Olives
- Meats and Seafood:
 - Tuna
 - Shrimp
 - Chopped salami
 - Cut up turkey breast/chicken breast
 - Grilled chicken
 - Roast beef
 - Cubed ham
- Cheeses: grated parmesan cheese/sliced fresh mozzarella
- Croutons (optional)

Directions:

1. Place salad greens and vegetable additions in large salad bowl.
2. Add meats or seafood if desired.
3. Pour enough olive oil over mixture to coat the greens.
4. Carefully drizzle enough red wine vinegar and lemon juice on salad: enough to taste but not to over power the salad.
5. Salt and pepper to taste.
6. Sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese and toss with hands till well mixed. Serve cold.

Italian Baked Stuffed Shells



Baked jumbo stuffed shells are a great alternative to serving baked lasagna. You can determine how many servings you will need for your dinner party and not have the worry of baking a huge casserole and having to serve leftovers for days.

With this recipe you can make as many as you want and you can even freeze the unbaked stuffed shells individually for use at a later date and again determine how many you want to bake.

The filling is the same as that used for lasagna, ravioli, and manicotti. I particularly like this dish when preparing a meal for just two. Served with a tossed salad, garlic bread, and a special bottle of red wine it can't be beat for a romantic dinner for two.

Ingredients:

Serves: 12

- Jumbo pasta shells
- 15-oz container ricotta cheese
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 tbs chopped Italian parsley
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/8 tsp black pepper
- Marinara sauce (homemade or store bought) – try my [homemade marinara sauce recipe](#)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°
2. Cook shells in boiling salted water until tender. Do not overcook.
3. Drain shells and place on cookie sheet on a layer of wax paper to keep shells from sticking together.
4. Mix ricotta cheese, egg, parmesan cheese, mozzarella cheese, chopped parsley, salt and pepper.



5. Fill shell by tablespoon until it fills shape of shell.



6. Coat the bottom of casserole dish with marinara sauce. Use casserole pan that will hold the amount of shells you plan to bake. (9×13 holds 12 or more, 8×8 holds 6 – 8 shells).
7. Lay shells in bottom of casserole dish and do not have them touching.



8. Cover shells with marinara sauce and a sprinkle of parmesan cheese.
9. Cover dish with foil and bake in preheated oven for 35 to 40 minutes until hot and bubbly.
10. Let casserole sit several minutes before serving.

Directions for freezing shells for baking later:

1. Fill cooked shells and place on a foil lined tray.
2. Do not have shells touching.

3. Cover shells with wax paper and place tray in freezer.
4. When shells are thoroughly frozen place in zip-lock freezer bag and freeze up to 2 months.



Baking frozen shells:

1. Preheat oven to 375°
2. Place frozen shells in casserole dish coated with sauce.
3. Cover shells with marinara sauce and sprinkle with parmesan cheese.
4. Cover casserole with tin foil. Bake 45-50 minutes.