

Red Velvet Cake with Coconut Icing

If you skipped ahead and ran a practiced eye down the list of ingredients for this recipe, you may have stopped at the tenth ingredient and responded with a quick and emphatic, "No way!" We must admit there was a dubious quality to our own reaction when this cake was introduced to us by one of our loveliest students, Joan Phillips. She finally persuaded us to try it. We fell enough in love with its old-fashioned flavor to include it in our menus and in this volume. It's the cake Joan's family most opts for on birthdays. They're consistent in their request, but not with their choice of color, so given free rein, Joan usually makes it in red. It comes out a rich, dark, red velvet. And once in tribute of her husband's homecoming weekend at the University of Southern California, she colored one layer red and the other gold, the school's colors. It can also be baked into twenty-four cupcakes. Topped with fluffy white icing and coconut, it's fit to sit on anyone's table, ready to be enjoyed by man, woman or child.

The recipe makes a 9-inch two-layer cake. To make two gifts, the layers may be iced and given separately. Double the recipe if desired.

Shortening and flour for the pans

½ cup Crisco vegetable shortening

1½ cups sugar

2 large eggs

2 cups sifted all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon cocoa

½ teaspoon salt

1 cup buttermilk

½ teaspoon vanilla

¼ cup (2-ounce bottle) red food coloring (do not skimp on this!)

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 tablespoon white or cider vinegar

For the Icing

1 cup milk

¼ cup flour

Dash salt

½ cup Crisco vegetable shortening

1 stick (¼ pound) butter or margarine

1 cup sugar

1½ teaspoons vanilla

1 cup (3½-ounce can) flaked coconut

Preheat the oven to 350°. Grease two 9-inch round cake pans. Dust the insides of the pans with flour and shake out any excess.

In the large bowl of an electric mixer, cream the ½ cup shortening with the sugar. Add the eggs and beat until the mixture is very smooth and creamy. Sift together three times the flour, cocoa, and salt; add to the creamed mixture alternately with the buttermilk while beating. Add the vanilla and food coloring, beating until well combined and evenly colored.

Stir the soda into the vinegar and immediately blend it into the batter. Divide the batter evenly between the two prepared pans. Bake at the center rack position of a 350° oven for 30 to 35 minutes until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Turn the layers out onto a rack to cool completely before frosting.

To make the frosting, blend together the milk, flour, and salt (making sure no lumps remain) in a small, heavy saucepan. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until thick and puddinglike; remove from heat and cool. In the bowl of an electric mixer beat the ½ cup shortening, butter or margarine, and sugar until very light and creamy. Add the vanilla and the pudding mixture and beat at high speed until it is thick and spreadable. Frost the cake completely and sprinkle with coconut.

TO PREPARE IN ADVANCE: This cake is very moist and keeps beautifully. May be stored, covered, at room temperature for up to five days, in the refrigerator for up to two weeks, or in the freezer for up to four months. If the cake is to be frozen, place it in the freezer unwrapped. After the icing is solid, seal in a large plastic bag. This way, the icing will be less likely to be smudged. This cake may be refrozen.

SPECIAL PACKAGING: Any kind of serving plate would be ideal.

THE LABEL: The color is the surprise! *If the cake is freshly baked, the label should read:* May be kept, covered, at room temperature for up to five days, in the refrigerator for up to two weeks, or frozen for up to four months. May be refrozen. *If the cake is frozen, the label should read:* May be kept frozen for up to four months; may be stored in an airtight container for up to five days or in the refrigerator for up to two weeks after it has been thawed. May be refrozen.

