

# Caramel Apple Cake

**SERVES** Serves 10 to 12

**TIME** 2½ hours, plus 2 hours cooling and 20 minutes chilling



## Why This Recipe Works

For an awesome dessert to showcase fall's bounty of apples, we sandwiched slightly salted, bittersweet caramel between layers of warm-spice-specked applesauce cake. We wanted the cake to be supermoist and sing with the concentrated flavor of apples. To achieve this, we turned to applesauce (a great source of moisture) and apple cider. Cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves provided warm, spicy notes. And rather than stick with the vegetable oil called for in so many snack cake recipes, we opted for melted butter for its rich flavor. We made the caramel filling extra-thick so it wouldn't seep out when the cake was cut. By cooking the sugar to a deep amber color, we tempered the sweetness of the caramel. Butter and heavy cream transformed the mixture into a thick but spreadable filling while just ½ teaspoon of salt gave it the right salty-sweet balance. Frosting the whole cake with caramel buttercream tied all the components together, and crafting roses out of thinly sliced apples proved to be a surprisingly simple decoration with high visual impact.

## Gather Your Ingredients

### Salted Caramel Filling

- 1 cup (7 ounces/198 grams) granulated sugar
- ¼ cup water
- 2 tablespoons light corn syrup

## Before You Begin

- \* For the best results, use a mandoline to slice the apples paper-thin. Be sure to buy regular applesauce, not unsweetened, for the applesauce cake layers. To prevent unwanted crystallization in the caramel, do not stir until step 2.

## Instructions

- 6** tablespoons heavy cream
- 4** tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt

### Applesauce Cake Layers

- 2** $\frac{1}{4}$  cups (11 $\frac{1}{4}$  ounces/319 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1** $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons baking soda
- 1** teaspoon salt
- 1** teaspoon ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon ground nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon ground cloves
- 1** $\frac{1}{4}$  cups applesauce
- 1** cup (7 ounces/198 grams) granulated sugar
- 16** tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup apple cider
- 2** large eggs
- 1** $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons vanilla extract

### Caramel Buttercream

#### Frosting

- 24** tablespoons (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 3** cups (12 ounces/340 grams) confectioners' sugar
- 2** tablespoons heavy cream

- 1.** For the salted caramel filling: Combine sugar, water, and corn syrup in medium saucepan. Bring to boil over medium-high heat and cook, without stirring, until mixture is amber-colored around edge of saucepan, 4 to 6 minutes. Reduce heat to low and continue to cook, swirling saucepan occasionally, until evenly dark amber, 2 to 5 minutes longer.
- 2.** Off heat, carefully stir in cream, butter, vanilla, and salt (mixture will bubble and steam). Return saucepan to medium heat and cook, stirring frequently, until smooth. Carefully transfer caramel to bowl and let cool completely, about 2 hours. (Once cooled, caramel filling will be very thick.)
- 3.** For the applesauce cake layers: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Grease two 9-inch round cake pans and line with parchment paper.
- 4.** Whisk flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves together in medium bowl; set aside. Whisk applesauce, sugar, melted butter, cider, eggs, and vanilla together in large bowl. Add flour mixture to applesauce mixture and whisk until just combined.
- 5.** Divide batter evenly between prepared pans and smooth tops with rubber spatula. Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 35 to 40 minutes, rotating pans halfway through baking. Let cakes cool in pans on wire rack for 15 minutes. Remove cakes from pans, discarding parchment, and let cool completely on rack, about 2 hours.
- 6.** For the caramel buttercream frosting: Using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, whip butter on medium-high speed until smooth, about 20 seconds. Reduce speed to low and slowly add sugar, cream, vanilla, and salt. Whip until sugar is moistened, about 1 minute. Scrape down bowl and add  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup caramel filling. Whip on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 4 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed.
- 7.** Place 1 cake layer on plate or pedestal. Spread remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup caramel filling evenly over top, leaving  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch border around edge. Spread  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup frosting evenly over caramel, right to edge of cake. Top with second cake layer, pressing lightly to adhere, then spread remaining frosting over top and sides of cake. Refrigerate cake until frosting is firm, about 20 minutes.

**2** teaspoons vanilla extract

$\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon salt

### **Apple Rosettes**

**2** Fuji, Gala, or Pink Lady apples, cored, quartered, and sliced very thin

**2** tablespoons granulated sugar

**2** tablespoons lemon juice

**8.** For the apple rosettes: Toss apples, sugar, and lemon juice in bowl until all slices are coated; let sit until apple slices are flexible, about 5 minutes. Shingle 5 apple slices lengthwise in straight line on cutting board. Starting at 1 end, roll up slices to form rose shape; place rose in center of cake. Repeat, arranging apple roses close together, until you have 5-inch-wide bunch of roses atop cake. Arrange remaining apple slices, overlapping with flat side facing down, around bottom edge of cake. Serve.