



## ANSON MILLS

### Coconut Layer Cake

#### Yield

One 8-inch (4-layer) cake, serving 8 to 10

#### Time

About 4 hours, total (for the cake, 20 minutes to make the batter, 45 minutes baking time, and 2 hours cooling time; for the frosting, about 20 minutes active time, plus 90 minutes cooling time; to assemble the cake, about 30 minutes, including 15 minutes to set the crumb coat)

#### Baking Notes

There is only so much creative fondling a butter cake recipe will countenance. Cake formulas are wedded to certain proportions and that's all there is to it. Any butter cake of note is bound to be but a tweak or two away from one of Rose Levy Beranbaum's butter cake recipes—and those who pretend otherwise are kidding themselves or trying to kid you.

We have adopted the reverse creaming method popularized by Ms. Beranbaum as well. It's so easy and the results so pleasing that you'll feel like you've cheated—but instead of getting caught you've been *rewarded* for your laziness.

To get the most out of what coconut offers both as flavor and textural components, we toast and then crush the portion that goes between the layers, giving it fuller flavor and an almost praline type of crunch. For the outer cloud of coconut, we let it dry just a bit in the oven to give it a little chew, and spin it around in the food processor to make the shreds rounder, plumper, and way more fun to eat.

We chose vanilla to flavor the frosting on this cake. If you prefer a more pronounced coconut flavor, get some real coconut extract. Artificial coconut flavoring will make the frosting taste like suntan lotion.

#### Equipment Mise en Place

For the cake, you will need a digital kitchen scale; a fine-mesh sieve; parchment or waxed paper; as stand mixer fitted with the flat-beater attachment; a whisk; a paring knife or chef's knife; two 2-cup liquid measuring cups (or a measuring cup and a small pitcher or other vessel with a spout); two sturdy 8-inch round cake pans with 2-inch sides; a rubber spatula; a small offset spatula; and a wire cooling rack.

For the frosting, you will need a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan, a whisk, a heatproof rubber spatula, a small bowl, and a stand mixer fitted with the flat-beater attachment

To prepare the coconut for assembly and finishing, you will need two parchment-lined baking sheets, a metal spatula, a small bowl, and a food processor.

To assemble the cake, you will need a serrated knife to cut the cake into layers, an 8-inch cardboard cake round, a metal icing spatula, and a baking sheet to toast the coconut for the filling. Like all layer cakes, the finished cake will slice more neatly if you have an electric knife.

## **Ingredients**

### *for the cake*

10 ounces Anson Mills Artisan Fine Cloth-Bolted White Lammas Cake Flour, plus additional for dusting the cake pans  
10 ounces superfine sugar  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
½ teaspoon fine sea salt  
5.2 ounces cold unsalted European-style butter, plus additional for greasing the pans  
2 large eggs  
1 large egg yolk  
8 ounces whole milk, room temperature  
2½ teaspoons vanilla extract

### *for the frosting*

9 ounces superfine sugar  
1.1 ounces cornstarch  
¼ teaspoon fine sea salt  
15.5 ounces cold whole milk  
2 teaspoons coconut extract or vanilla extract  
12.5 ounces unsalted European-style butter, room temperature

### *for assembly*

10.5 ounces (4½ cups, loosely packed) sweetened shredded coconut

## **Directions**

- 1. *Make the cake:*** Sift the flour onto a sheet of parchment or waxed paper. Turn the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt into the bowl of a stand mixer and whisk to combine. Cut the cold butter into little pieces, add them to the flour, and toss to coat. Set aside until the flour has lost its chill and the butter has completely softened.
- 2.** Place a 2-cup liquid measuring cup on a digital kitchen scale and tare the scale. Crack the whole eggs into the measuring cup and add the yolk. The mixture should weigh 4 ounces; if it weighs more, beat the eggs with a fork and pour or spoon off enough so that they weigh exactly 4 ounces. Add ¼ cup of the milk to the eggs along with the vanilla and whisk to combine.
- 3.** Adjust an oven rack to the lower-middle position and heat the oven to 350 degrees. Generously butter 2 sturdy 8-inch round cake pans with 2-inch sides. Sprinkle the pans with flour, tilting them to coat the bottom and sides, and then knock out the excess. Set the pans aside.

**4.** With the mixer running on low speed, combine the butter and flour until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs, about 2 minutes. Increase the mixer speed to medium and add the milk in a steady stream. Beat for 1 minute on medium speed to develop structure. With the mixer running on medium-low speed, add the egg mixture in 3 additions, beating well and scraping down the bowl after each. As soon as all of the ingredients have been incorporated, detach the bowl from the mixer and fold the batter lightly with the rubber spatula. The batter will be smooth and shiny, and look slightly broken.

**5.** Scrape the batter into the prepared pans, dividing it evenly (about 18 ounces of batter per pan), and smooth the surfaces with a small offset spatula, banking the batter slightly around the edges and leaving the center slightly depressed. Gently drop each pan on the counter to distribute the batter. Bake the cakes until nicely risen, golden brown on the edges, and the centers spring back when touched with a finger, about 35 minutes. Let the cakes cool in their pans on a wire rack for 10 minutes, then invert the cakes onto the rack to cool. When they have cooled for 30 minutes, turn them right side up and let them cool completely, about 2 hours.

**6. *Make the frosting base:*** While the cakes are cooling, combine the sugar, cornstarch, and salt in a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan and whisk well. Whisk in the cold milk. Cook over medium-high heat, alternately whisking and stirring with a heatproof rubber spatula, until the mixture thickens and comes to a boil, about 5 minutes. Reduce the heat and simmer for 20 seconds, whisking constantly. Remove from the heat and scrape the mixture into a small bowl. Cover flush with plastic wrap and refrigerate until cool, about 1 hour.

**7. *Prepare the coconut:*** Heat the oven to 300 degrees. Spread 3.5 ounces of the coconut (1½ cups loosely packed) on a parchment paper-lined rimmed baking sheet. Separate the flakes with your fingers, rubbing away any lumps. Toast the coconut until golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes, turning occasionally with a metal spatula. Meanwhile, spread the remaining coconut on a second parchment paper-lined rimmed baking sheet. Separate the flakes with your fingers, rubbing away any lumps. When the coconut in the oven is toasted, set it aside to cool. Turn off the oven and place the untoasted coconut in the oven to dry until you're ready to assemble the cake.

**8. *Finish the frosting:*** Place the butter in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the flat beater attachment and beat on medium speed until very light and fluffy, scraping down the bowl once or twice. Add the coconut or vanilla extract, mix to combine, and scrape down the bowl. With the mixer running on low speed, add the cooled frosting base a few tablespoons at a time, scraping down the bowl occasionally, until the base is fully incorporated and the buttercream is smooth and fluffy. Transfer the frosting to a smaller bowl for ease during assembly.

**9.** Crush the toasted coconut into fine pieces between your palms and turn it into a small bowl. Remove the coconut from the oven (it should be dry, but not browned). Turn it into a food processor and process it until the coconut shreds are fine and plump. Return the coconut to the baking sheet.

**10. Assemble the cake:** Cut each cake layer in half horizontally with a serrated knife, reserving the 2 flat bottom layers for the top and bottom layers of the frosted cake. Drop a dollop of buttercream onto an 8-inch cardboard cake round and set a flat bottom layer on top, crust side down. Using an icing spatula, apply a generous amount of frosting to the layer (about ½ cup), and then sprinkle with one-third of the toasted coconut. Top with a second layer and press gently to secure. Frost and sprinkle with toasted coconut. Frost and sprinkle the remaining toasted coconut on the third layer, and then top with the final flat layer of cake. Slide the icing spatula under the cake round and pull the cake to the edge of the counter. Balance the cake on the palm of your non-dominant hand and apply a thin crumb coat of frosting onto the top and sides of the cake, frosting to the edge of the cake round. Refrigerate the cake until the crumb coat sets, about 15 minutes.

**11.** Remove the cake from the refrigerator and frost the cake with the remaining frosting. Hold the cake over the baking sheet containing the coconut and use your free hand to gently press coconut into the sides and on top of the cake, allowing what doesn't adhere to fall back onto the baking sheet, until the sides are evenly covered. Sprinkle the top of the cake with coconut and press lightly all around to secure. Chill the cake slightly before serving.