

Easter Simnel Cake

100g/4oz red or natural glace cherries
225g/8oz softened butter
225g/8oz light muscovado sugar
4 large eggs
225g/8oz self-raising flour
225g/8oz sultanas
100g/4oz currants
50g/2oz chopped candied peel
Grated rind of 2 lemons
2 level tsp ground mixed spice

For the filling and topping

450g/1 lb marzipan
2 tablespoons apricot jam
Egg beaten to glaze

Method

Pre-heat the oven to 150 degrees/fan 130/ Gas 2. Grease a 20cm /8in deep round cake tin then line the base and sides with baking parchment.

Cut cherries into quarters, put in a sieve and rinse under running water. Drain well then dry thoroughly on kitchen paper. Measure all the cake ingredients into a large mixing bowl and beat well until thoroughly blended. Place half the mixture into the prepared tin and level the surface.

Take one third of the marzipan and roll it out into a circle the size of the tin and place on top of the cake mixture. Spoon the remaining cake mixture on top and level the surface.

Bake in pre-heated oven for about 2 ½ hours until well risen, evenly brown and firm to touch. Cover with foil after 1 hour if the top is browning too quickly. Leave to cool in the tin for about 10 minutes then turn out, peel the parchment and finish cooling on a wire rack.

When the cake is cool, brush the top with a little warm apricot jam and roll out half of the remaining marzipan to fit on top. Press firmly on top and crimp the edges to decorate. Mark a criss-cross pattern on the marzipan with a sharp knife. Form the remaining marzipan into 11 balls.

Brush the marzipan with the beaten egg and arrange the marzipan balls around the edge of the cake. Brush the tops of the balls with egg too, and place the cake under a hot grill to turn the marzipan golden.