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DIVAS ON A DIME

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By Patti Diamond

PHOTO CREDIT: www.JasonCoblentz.com

PHOTO CAPTION: A buttery Bundt cake crowned with tart cranberries and brightened with orange syrup — festive, moist and ready for a second slice.



A Cake Mix, a Cranberry Crown and a Little Orange Magic

Holiday baking doesn't always have to start from scratch. Sometimes it's about starting with a cake mix and knowing how to accessorize. A little cranberry sparkle, a little orange perfume and suddenly that ordinary yellow cake is something quite extraordinary.

This cranberry orange upside down Bundt cake gets its festive crown from cranberries simmered with butter, brown sugar and orange. They go into the pan first, followed by a batter enriched with sour cream, melted butter and orange zest. Once inverted, the cake wears its own sweet-tart topping. No frosting required. Maybe a few cranberries for fun.

An orange syrup adds another layer of flavor and moisture. It comes together in the same saucepan used for the cranberries, because an impressive dessert shouldn't require an impressive collection of dirty dishes.

The result is bright, buttery and just fancy enough to suggest you went to considerably more trouble than you did. Let them think.

CRANBERRY ORANGE UPSIDE DOWN BUNDT CAKE

Yield: 12 servings

Total Time: 1 hour

Diva Tip: This recipe uses one orange. Zest the orange before juicing it. You'll need about 4 teaspoons zest and 1/2 cup juice total; it doesn't have to be exact.

Cranberry topping:

1/4 cup butter
1/2 cup packed light or dark brown sugar
1/4 cup orange juice
2 teaspoons orange zest
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 cups fresh cranberries

Cake:

1 (14.25-ounce) box yellow cake mix
1/2 cup sour cream
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup butter, melted
3 eggs
2 teaspoons orange zest
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Orange syrup:

1/4 cup orange juice
1/4 cup water
1/2 cup granulated sugar



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A buttery Bundt cake crowned with tart cranberries and brightened with orange syrup — festive, moist and ready for a second slice.

Heat oven to 350 F degrees. Generously grease a Bundt pan with nonstick baking spray.

For the topping, combine butter, brown sugar, orange juice, zest and cinnamon in a small saucepan. Heat, stirring, until butter melts and sugar dissolves. Add cranberries; simmer until most berries pop and the mixture thickens. Spoon evenly into the prepared pan. Set the saucepan aside for the syrup.

For the cake, combine sour cream and milk until smooth. Place in a mixing bowl with cake mix, melted butter, eggs, zest, cinnamon and vanilla. Mix with a handheld mixer or by hand until well combined. Spoon batter over the cranberry mixture and spread evenly.

Bake 30-35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the cake comes out with a few crumbs but no wet batter. Place the pan on a cooling rack.

While the cake bakes, make the syrup. Combine orange juice, water and sugar in the reserved saucepan. Heat, stirring, until sugar dissolves.

Let the cake cool in its pan for 10 minutes. Gently loosen the outer edges and center with a thin spatula or knife. Leaving the cake in the pan; poke holes with a skewer. Slowly drizzle the orange syrup over the cake in several additions, letting each addition absorb before adding more. Once the syrup is absorbed, invert onto a serving plate. Spoon any cranberry topping remaining in the pan back onto the cake. Cool completely.

For a festive finish, arrange fresh cranberries and rosemary sprigs around the cake's base. Refrigerate leftovers, covered, for up to three days.

The cake is buttery and wonderfully moist, with bright orange notes and a tart cranberry topping that balances the richness. But the orange syrup is the little extra that makes it memorable, soaking into the crumb to create pockets that practically melt in your mouth. Cut modest slices. You can always have two.

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