

Apple Stack Cake (one 8", 6 layer cake or one 10", 4 layer cake)

Apple stack cake gained popularity in Appalachia well over a hundred years ago because it offered people in isolated communities a way to enjoy a fruit laden dessert well into winter. By using [apple butter](#) rather than spendy buttercream, it didn't cost much to put together either.

If you've never had or heard of this Appalachian classic, you can read more about it on [Gilt Taste](#). It has a wonderful gingery apple flavor and doesn't require any expertise to make. For all its towering layers, it embodies the word rustic. So don't worry if it leans, if patches of cake show through the apple butter, or if crumbs wind up where you normally wouldn't want 'em. It doesn't have defects, it has character.



Most recipes for apple stack cake require aging the cake for a day or two, a bit like fruit cake, to let the flavors meld and give the lean cake layers a chance to soak up the apple butter. But as I researched the cake, I found the oldest recipes called for serving it immediately, warm if possible. So if you've made stack cake before, throw what you know out the window. This cake does *not* want to wait. Eat the day you make it. A slice the next day has its merits, but slowly turns to mush with each passing day.



This recipe makes four 10" or six 8" layers, all quite thin. I doubled it to make the twelve layered monster in the photos. Generally, the cake will feed two people for every layer made; as written, it will serve twelve. If you'd rather make a half batch, click through the link above to Gilt, which includes a smaller recipe.

Apple Stack Cake

26 ounces all-purpose flour, sifted
8 ounces unsalted butter or lard, room temperature
8 ounces brown sugar
1 Tablespoon ground ginger
1 Tablespoon fresh ginger, grated
2 tablespoon baking soda
12 ounces molasses or sorghum
2 eggs, lightly beaten
2 tablespoons vanilla extract
4 ounces buttermilk

To Finish

4 ounces unsalted butter, melted
4 cups apple butter (store bought is fine)
12 tablespoons heavy cream
1 Tablespoon freshly grated nutmeg

Preheat oven to 350°.

Traditionalists can make this in a 10" cast iron skillet, brushed generously with melted butter. For a more modern approach, make the layers in 8" cake pans lined with parchment and lightly greased.

With a hand or stand mixer, the latter fitted with a paddle attachment, cream lard or butter with the brown sugar, gingers, baking soda and molasses. Beat on medium about four minutes; stop halfway to scrape the bowl down. Reduce speed to low, add the eggs one at a time. Once fully incorporated, add the flour all at once, followed by vanilla and buttermilk. Continue mixing on low speed until homogenous. It will look very thick compared to a standard cake batter.

Use 15 ounces of batter per 10" skillet, or 10 ounces batter per 8" pan. Either way, you will need to use an offset spatula to spread the batter into a thin, even layer in each skillet or pan.

Bake until the cakes have puffed and spring back when touched lightly, about 12 minutes for the 10" layer or 10 minutes for the 8" layers. Loosen the cakes by running a knife around the edges of the skillet or pan, then invert onto a wire cooling rack.

If using the cast iron skillet, dust off stray crumbs with a clean towel, brush with fresh butter and refill with batter; you don't need to wait for the skillet to cool. Bake as before.

With standard layer cakes, you must let the layers cool before stacking because the heat of the cake will melt the buttercream. But such is not the case with apple butter, so you can begin stacking the cakes as soon as you'd like.

Set the first cake on a serving plate or cake stand. Brush lightly with melted butter. Use an offset spatula to spread ½ cup apple butter over the top from edge to edge. Continue laying like this, brushing with butter then covering in apple butter. When you reach the last layer, spread any remaining apple butter over the top and sides of the cake.

As I said, it's a notoriously rustic cake. Embrace its imperfections.



Enjoy immediately, with a sprinkling of fresh nutmeg and a splash of cream. If the cake has a chance to cool before serving, serve with warm cream; cold cream is unexpectedly lovely with warm cake.