

Apple Pecan Carrot Cake

2 1/3 cups finely chopped lightly toasted pecans, divided
2 cups flour
2 tsp baking soda
2 tsp apple pie spice
1/2 tsp salt
3 large eggs, lightly beaten
2 cups sugar
3/4 cup vegetable oil
3/4 cup buttermilk
2 tsp vanilla extract
2 cups peeled and grated Granny Smith apples
1 1/2 cups grated carrots
2/3 cup plus 2 Tbsp Apple Cider Caramel Sauce (recipe below)
Mascarpone Frosting (recipe below)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Sprinkle 1 1/3 cups toasted pecans into 2 well-buttered shiny 9-inch round cake pans; shake to coat bottom and sides of pans.

Stir together flour and next 3 ingredients.

Stir together eggs and next 4 ingredients in a large bowl until blended. Add flour mixture, stirring just until blended. Fold in apples, carrots, and remaining 1 cup pecans. Pour batter into prepared pans.

Bake at 350 degrees for 30-35 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pans 10 minutes. Remove from pans to wire racks and cool completely (about 1 hour).

Place 1 cake layer, pecan side down, on a serving plate. Spread top of cake layer with 2/3 cup Apple Cider Caramel Sauce; top with remaining cake layer, pecan side down. Spread Mascarpone Frosting over top of cake. Drizzle 2 Tbsp Apple Cider Caramel Sauce over frosting, and swirl sauce into frosting. Serve immediately.

Apple Cider Caramel Sauce

1 cup apple cider, freshly pressed if available
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1/2 cup butter
1/4 cup heavy cream

Cook cider in a 3-qt saucepan over medium heat, stirring often, 10 minutes or until reduced to 1/4 cup. Stir in remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring constantly. Boil, stirring constantly, for 2 minutes. Remove from heat, and cool completely. Refrigerate up to 1 week. To reheat, microwave at HIGH 10-15 seconds or just until warm; stir until smooth.

Mascarpone Frosting

1 (8-ounce) container mascarpone cheese
¼ cup powdered sugar
2 tsp vanilla extract
1 cup heavy cream

Whisk together first 3 ingredients in a large bowl just until blended. Beat heavy cream at medium speed with an electric mixer until stiff peaks form. Gently fold into mascarpone mixture.