Miss Rosie's Carrot Cake

Almost fifty years ago, my mother went on a hunt for a carrot cake recipe after having some made by a "friend" who wouldn't share her recipe. She would only say that it had "a little crushed pineapple in it". Since my Mom is a pretty smart girl, she enlisted the help of her mother-in-law, my Nana Nelson, in hunting down a recipe for "carrot cake made with crushed pineapple". My grandmother found this recipe a few months after the search began, that was in 1971. That is when it became the "Official Birthday Cake" in my family.

Since that time, I have tried dozens of different carrot cake recipes – with buttermilk, with pineapple juice, with orange zest, with orange juice concentrate, without nuts (blasphemy), with raisins, with different spices, and so on. Most are good, some are very good, but this one is far and away my favorite recipe, primarily because of the texture of the cake – it isn't quite as dense and heavy as many other carrot cake recipes.

Just as there are other carrot cake recipes, there are also dozens of variations of this basic recipe. I've tried a few and I keep coming back to this one with the amounts of ingredients because of the taste and the texture. Some recipes add more sugar, some use less, other recipes use less pineapple or don't drain it. Some recipes use pecans instead of walnuts. The place where I find the most differences is with the recipe for the icing, most of those use two-to-three times as much butter or margarine.

I know, it's a Goldilocks kind of thing, this is the one that's "just right" for me. And Rosie.

There are a couple of things that I like to pass along when I share the recipe:

- The "Wesson oil". Any light vegetable oil will substitute. The original recipe called for Wesson so that's what is on my recipe card. But I generally use canola oil or "vegetable" oil. Just don't use anything with a strong flavor of its own.

- Baking pans. We've made this cake using three 8" round cake pans, two 9" square cake pans, 9" x 13" Pyrex dishes, 1 lb. loaf pans, and so on. It works with anything and the baking time can be adjusted easily.

- Baking time. There is a 10-minute range given for the two cake pans listed below and there is a reason for that. Depending on how well-drained the pineapple is and how fresh/moist the carrots are, the cake can take longer to bake. The good news is that with almost 40 years experience baking this cake, I can tell you that it's hard to over-bake it and dry it out. Just use a cake-tester and keep checking the cake.

- Cream Cheese Icing. If you are making a layer-cake and would like icing on the sides of the cake, you will need to double the recipe.

Carrot Cake with Cream Cheese Icing

3	eggs
2 cups	sugar
1 cup	Wesson oil ~ any light vegetable or canola oil will work
2 cups	flour
2 tsp.	baking soda
1 tsp.	salt
3 tsp.	cinnamon
2 cups	finely grated carrots
1 cup	crushed pineapple, drained
1 cup	coconut – shredded or flaked
1 cup	walnuts, coarsely chopped and toasted (optional)

Preheat oven to 350°. Butter or spray one 9″ x 13″ baking pan or two 9″ round cake pans. Set aside.

Combine eggs, sugar and oil in a large bowl and mix until smooth and creamy.

Sift together flour, soda, salt and cinnamon. Slowly add to egg mixture until combined and smooth.

By hand, stir in carrots, pineapple, coconut and walnuts.

Pour batter into the cake pans. Bake the 9″ x 13″ cake for 45 to 55 minutes. Bake the round cake pans for 40 to 50 minutes. Bake the cake until a cake-tester comes out clean.

Let the cake cool at least 30 minutes before frosting.

Note: For a layer-cake, remove the cakes from the pans after they have cooled for at least 10 minutes.

Cream Cheese Icing

3 oz.	cream cheese, softened
1 tbsp.	butter or margarine, softened
1 tsp.	vanilla
2 cups	powdered sugar
1 cup	walnuts, chopped and toasted ~ optional

Beat cream cheese, butter or margarine and vanilla until smooth and well-blended.

Slowly add powdered sugar until smooth.

Spread icing on cake. Try not to over-sample icing during the process.

Sprinkle chopped walnuts evenly over the top of the cake ~ if desired.