

## Buttermilk Strawberry Cake

2 quarts fresh ripe strawberries  
3.6 ounces freeze-dried strawberries  
2¾ cups cake flour  
2½ teaspoons baking powder  
1½ teaspoons baking soda  
¾ teaspoon salt  
2 cups sugar  
½ pound unsalted butter  
⅔ cup egg whites (4-5 eggs)  
⅔ cup buttermilk  
1 teaspoon vanilla

### For the Strawberry Ermine Icing

6 tablespoons flour  
1½ cups sugar  
Pinch kosher salt  
1¼ cups whole milk  
¼ cup heavy cream  
½ pound unsalted butter  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
¼ cup reduced strawberry purée  
½ cup freeze-dried strawberry powder  
*(Purée and powder taken from amount designated for the cake)*

### For the Strawberry Cake

Wash and hull the fresh strawberries. Place them in a bowl of a food processor and process until they become a smooth purée. This should yield slightly over 3 cups of purée. Pour the purée into a medium saucepan over medium-low heat. Cook the purée until it is reduced by half, to about 1½ cups. It's essential to stir the mixture frequently because it can burn easily. The cooking should take about 45 minutes to an hour. Let the purée cool to room temperature. This process can be done a day or two ahead of making the cake by refrigerating the sauce. On the day you make the cake, be sure to remove the purée from the refrigerator, and bring it to room temperature.

Place the freeze-dried strawberries (3 packages if you use Trader Joe's brand) in the bowl of a food processor. Process the strawberries until they become a fine powder. This can also be done a day or two ahead and stored in a tightly closed jar.

When ready to make the cake, butter two 9-inch-round cake pans, and line them with a buttered round of parchment, buttered side up. Place a rack in the middle of the oven, and preheat the oven to 350°. Make certain that the butter, egg whites, reduced strawberry purée, and buttermilk are all at room temperature.

In a large bowl, place the cake flour, ½ cup of sifted freeze-dried strawberry powder (to remove any seeds), the baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Whisk these dried ingredients until they are well combined.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, place the room-temperature butter, and beat on low speed until the butter is well creamed. With the mixer running, gradually add the sugar in a steady stream. Once all the sugar is added, increase the mixer speed to medium, and continue to beat for a few minutes until the mixture is very fluffy.

Slowly pour in the egg whites and the vanilla and continue beating for a minute until very fluffy. Return the mixer to a low speed. Gradually, add the remaining ingredients in at least

3 stages, alternating between the dry ingredients, the reduced purée, and the buttermilk, beating just until the batter is homogenized. Do not overbeat.

Divide the batter evenly between the 2 prepared cake pans. Place in the oven and bake for about 30-35 minutes, until the sides of the cake begin to pull away from the pan.

Cool the cakes in the pans on a rack for 20 minutes. Invert the cakes onto the rack, carefully remove the parchment, and let them cool fully.

### **For the Strawberry Ermine Icing**

Make certain the butter and the reduced strawberry purée are at room temperature.

In a medium saucepan, place the flour, and whisk in the sugar and salt until they are thoroughly combined. Then gradually add the milk and the heavy cream, again whisking until thoroughly combined. Be certain to scrape the bottom edge of the pan (I use a knife or spoon) because any clumping in that area will burn.

Place the mixture over medium heat, and whisk constantly, scraping the bottom edges. After 7-8 minutes the mixture should begin to thicken. Continue to whisk for several more minutes until the mixture becomes thick and pudding-like. Careful that the edges do not burn. With a rubber spatula, scrape the mixture into a large bowl, and press a layer of plastic wrap over the top to prevent a skin from forming. Let the mixture cool to room temperature, which can take a couple hours.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, place the room-temperature butter, and begin creaming it on medium speed. Sift in the ½ cup of freeze-dried strawberry powder, and continue beating until it is very fluffy. Beat in the room-temperature flour mixture 2 tablespoons at a time, being certain the icing is fully homogenized. Finally beat in the vanilla, and gradually add the ¼ cup of strawberry purée until fully combined. Chill the icing for about 45 minutes until it is at a nice spreading consistency.

Place one cake layer bottom-side-up (this prevents having a domed top) on a cake plate. Frost this layer, then place the second layer on top, bottom-side-up. Frost the top and sides of the cake with the remaining icing. The cake will remain fresh, covered at room temperature for 3-4 days.