

MY CHEESECAKE PROTOTYPES

By Joel Havian

For a period of time, I have been experimenting with a cottage cheese-based “cheese pie” recipe from a health-oriented book called *The American Heart Association Cookbook*. The result has been quite a few cheesecakes with variations on this recipe, in a number of attempts to make cottage cheese cakes to my liking. The recipe for the filling, in particular, is what I have been varying in these “prototypes”.

The prototype listings below describe my efforts and experiences in the preparations and tastings of these cheesecakes.

PROTOTYPE 1

For starters, I felt that I should begin with a basic, plain-tasting cheesecake. I thought that the recipe in the cookbook that I was using would be a reasonably good place to start, so I prepared the dessert according to that. The filling, to me, was the most crucial part of the recipe, hence the discussion of the ingredients in these prototype listings focuses on that part of the cheesecake. The crust was not nearly as much important to me. I used the following ingredients to make the filling:

- 2 cups of lowfat cottage cheese
- 2 tablespoons of margarine (I used Fleischmann's Light)
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup of sugar
- 1/2 cup of skim milk
- 1/4 cup of flour
- 1/2 teaspoon of salt
- 1/4 cup of lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon of lemon rind (peel)

- From “Baked Cheese Pie”, *The American Heart Association Cookbook*, (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1973), p. 328

Comments: Way too lemony! Somewhat bitter lemon taste. The taste became a little more palatable as days went by and the cake thus aged a bit.

PROTOTYPE 2

Cut down on those lemon ingredients! Repeat the lineup of ingredients for prototype 1, but this time use only 1 tablespoon of lemon juice and 1 teaspoon of lemon peel.

Comments: This cake now seemed to have just the right amount of lemon flavor - a good prototype for those who want a lemon-flavored cheesecake. But I still wanted a fairly plain-tasting one - on to the next prototype.

PROTOTYPE 3

Cut the lemon juice down to 1 *teaspoon*. Cut the lemon peel down to 1/4 of a teaspoon. Note that this prototype involves only 1/12 of each of the lemon ingredients that were used in prototype 1.

Comments: A great plain-flavored cheesecake! A helpful launching pad for the chocolate prototypes. On we go with the cocoa experiments.

PROTOTYPE 4

Using prototype 3, increase the skim milk to 3/4 of a cup to help compensate for the decrease in wet ingredients (lemon juice) and increase in dry ones. Increase the sugar to 3/4 of a cup, and add 1/2 of a cup of cocoa powder.

Comments: Way too much cocoa! Probably too much undersweetened too! The taste was barely tolerable (for me, personally).

PROTOTYPE 5

Using prototype 4, decrease the cocoa to only 1/3 of a cup.

Comments: Still, to my surprise, too much cocoa. I brought this one to a little Passover seder held by my Malden/Melrose Bible study home group. I could not blame anybody there for not being wild about this prototype. Al Borans, the leader of this group, was among those who readily noticed the excessive chocolate. I myself felt that this cheesecake needed further improvement.

PROTOTYPE 6

Using prototype 5, cut back that cocoa even further to only 1/4 of a cup. With this small amount of cocoa, I also chose to cut down on the amount of sugar - to only 2/3 of a cup.

Comments: Acceptable (at least to me, personally, and to others who prefer a low-sugar chocolate cheesecake). But now I started to compare my prototypes to a chocolate cheesecake that I had been enjoying for the past few years - Alden Merrell's. Prototype 6 tasted almost too much undersweetened compared to it.

PROTOTYPE 7

Use prototype 6, but boost that sugar back up to 3/4 of a cup.

Comments: We're getting there. Still not quite as much sweet as Alden Merrell's but not particularly too much undersweetened in the comparisons either.

PROTOTYPE 8

Use prototype 7, but boost the sugar even further - to one whole cup.

Comments: I think that this one just might be about as much sweet as Alden Merrell's. But, still, prototype 8 seems to have tasted perhaps a bit tart by comparison. Should I perhaps just cut out the two lemon ingredients altogether? (I have to admit, though, that these prototypes have come a long way. Mark Lupo, another person in my Bible study home group, tried this cake and reacted quite favorably to it.)

PROTOTYPE 9

Okay, let's delete those two ingredients. Use prototype 8 minus the lemon juice and the lemon peel. I probably have also cut the skim milk back to 1/2 of a cup (in an effort to make the cake come out more firm), but I cannot remember at this time.

Comments: This one was a tough comparison - this cake still had at least some trace of tart flavor, but so did the Alden Merrell (probably more, but not always that easy to tell). Prototype 9 also seemed to be likely a little sweeter. This cheesecake also appeared to taste significantly more chocolatey than Alden Merrell's. Maybe it still had a little too much chocolate for some. This would probably make a good chocolate cheesecake for strong chocoholics, but this is supposed to be a *cheesecake* too! I myself thought that the chocolate flavor dominated this prototype too much.

PROTOTYPE 10

Let's cut back on the amount of chocolate. Using prototype 9, use only 3 tablespoons of cocoa. To correspond to this reduction, cut down on the sugar also - but just a little bit - to 7/8 of a cup (if this is a rather tricky amount, consider measuring 3/4 of a cup and then adding two tablespoons). I probably have also used 1/2 of a cup of skim milk instead of 3/4 of a cup (see prototype 9, above) in this cheesecake, but I can't remember at this time.

Comments: The chocolate did not seem to be too dominant this time, but this was still another tough comparison. Prototype 10 and the Alden Merrell still differed from each other in taste, and I finally suspected that there had to be other reasons (besides the amounts of sugar, cocoa, or lemon ingredients used) for these remaining taste differences. The Alden Merrell cake in this comparison seemed to have a slightly bittersweet chocolate flavor, as well as a slightly tart taste, compared to my prototype. The two chocolate cheesecakes simply tasted *still* a little different from each other, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. I suspected the causes for these differences to probably be Alden Merrell's supposed usage of cream cheese (and probably sour cream too) as opposed to cottage cheese. For a chocolate-flavored *cottage* cheesecake, though, I have thought that this was about the closest in taste that I could come to Alden Merrell's, so I finally halted the chocolate prototypes here.

We have come a long way with the chocolate prototypes. To sum things up, let's recap the usage of ingredients for prototype 10:

- 2 cups of lowfat cottage cheese
- 2 tablespoons of Fleischmann's Light (or margarine)
- 2 eggs
- 7/8 cup of sugar
- 1/2 cup of skim milk (may have been 3/4 cup - see above)
- 1/4 cup of flour
- 1/2 teaspoon of salt
- 3 tablespoons of cocoa powder

For reference purposes in later prototypes, let's assume the amount of skim milk in prototype 10 to be 1/2 of a cup.

PROTOTYPE 11

Time for a change of pace at last! Let's make an orange cheesecake. Going all the way back to prototype 1, substitute 1/4 of a cup of orange juice and 1 tablespoon of orange peel (rind) for the two lemon ingredients.

Comments: At first, the taste seemed to make me rate this prototype to orange cheesecakes in pretty much the same way that I rated prototype 9 to chocolate cheesecakes. In other words, this seemed to be a cheesecake for "orange-a-holics", with the orange flavor being a little too dominant (for at least some of those not that wild about orange, though). But as this prototype aged, the orange taste yielded more to the cheese flavor.

PROTOTYPE 12

Let's cut down on the orange this time. Repeat the ingredients used in prototype 11, but this time use only 1 tablespoon of orange juice and 1 *teaspoon* of orange peel.

Comments: At first, this cake seemed to have just the right amount of orange flavor - a good prototype for those wanting an orange-flavored cheesecake (without too much orange dominance). But, of course, the orange taste faded as aging gave the cheese flavor more dominance. Perhaps an ideal orange cheesecake would contain 1/4 of a cup of orange juice and 1 teaspoon of orange peel (a reasonable go-between), but I was anxious to get on with the cherry prototypes. So I decided to save this next orange cheesecake for much later.

PROTOTYPE 13

Ready for a wild one? New ch-ch-ch-cherry cake...it's out and outrageous! Yes, it's time to make a cherry-flavored cheesecake. Finding a feasible way to put the cherry into this one was not an easy task. I finally took a can of cherry filling and liquified it in a blender. The result - I guess one could perhaps call it "cherry sauce". Using prototype 3, add 1/2 of a cup of this "sauce".

Comments: Where's the cherry?? I could barely taste it in this prototype. Looks like I went way too low on the cherry sauce. Oh well!

PROTOTYPE 14

Increase the cherry, of course! Repeat prototype 13, but this time use one whole cup of the cherry sauce. To compensate for this large addition of liquid, increase the flour to 1/2 of a cup (so that the cheesecake still turns out firm enough after baking).

Comments: The cherry came through this time, but likely with a little too much dominance. I was not that much thrilled about the cherry flavor either. Maybe it had a “baked pie” aroma to it that I didn’t enjoy. I thought that cherries were supposed to taste more lively - with some zing! Are *wild* cherries perhaps the ones that my taste buds were after?? I’m not sure. Here’s some good news, though. My previous prototypes were (hopefully) firm enough, but they did not seem to be as much firm as a typical *cream* cheesecake. This prototype, however, came out beautifully firm, and I suspected that the additional flour was the cause for this result. I would like to add, though, that I had baked prototypes 12 through 14 (and maybe 11 too) ten minutes longer than the usual ninety minutes.

PROTOTYPE 15

The flour firmness solution (hopefully) and the cherry flavoring problem have warranted a detour from the cherry prototypes here. Let’s make a firmer chocolate cheesecake. Using prototype 10, increase the flour to 1/3 of a cup (by the way, keep the skim milk at 1/2 of a cup). I also figured that I would bake this one (and all subsequent prototypes) for a hundred minutes.

Comments: Beautifully firm - in fact, more firm than I wanted it.

At this point, I thought that I would go back and retry prototype 10. The amount of skim milk used this time was a sure 1/2 of a cup, and the cheesecake was baked for about 100 minutes, but *the way that I measured the flour* was the crucial part of this preparation. In my earliest prototypes, I used a measuring cup to measure out 1/4 of a cup of this ingredient. The inconvenience of getting the flour leveled and flush with the 1/4 cup mark led to my utilising measuring *spoons* in many of my later prototypes, including #10. Assuming that it took 16 tablespoons to equal one cup, I measured out 4 tablespoons of flour, leveling off each one with a knife. I had, at some point, noticed that the tablespoon that I was using came up somewhat short, but I didn’t think that using a little less flour than an actual 1/4 of a cup would make too much difference. I was wrong. I returned to the measuring cup for this ingredient (firmly packing it as well during the measurement, but primarily to get it leveled and flush with the cup’s mark), and the cheesecake’s firmness appeared to have come out just right this time. (Of course, I still used the measuring tablespoon to measure the amount of cocoa powder.)

I could have perhaps called this one “prototype 16”, but this seemed to me to be more like a remake - the right way - of prototype 10. Okay, we’ve finally got a great chocolate cottage cheesecake! Now let’s end the chocolate “detour” and get back on to “Cherry Lane”.

PROTOTYPE 16

Let's face it - I wanted a decent-tasting, cherry cheesecake batter, but the cherry pie filling that I used earlier did not work out well. I wanted in the first place to get some cherry extract or cherry syrup, but, after searching several supermarkets, this has turned out to be a hopeless task for me. That is why I settled for liquefied cherry pie filling in the earlier prototypes. I have finally, out of frustration, decided to opt this time for a cherry-flavored cold drink mix, such as Kool-Aid. (I could have chosen another cherry pie filling, but then I thought that the water in the cherries themselves might dilute the cheesecake flavor too much. I therefore set my preferences on concentrated forms of cherry.) Joanne Konick, another person in my Bible study home group, suggested using some form of cherry topping on top of the cheesecake, rather than mixing cherry ingredients into the batter - or switching to a different flavor that I could more easily get (in the form of an extract/flavoring or syrup). But I still needed a decent-tasting, *cherry*-flavored, cheesecake *filling* - for an upcoming prototype that I had been dreaming of for a long time. Thus, I bought some pre-sweetened, cherry-flavored Kool-Aid mix. Using prototype 3, add 1/4 of a cup of this mix.

Comments: Great, lively, cherry taste! But I still wanted the cheese flavor also to show up, and its sufficient presence in this prototype seemed rather debatable to me. It took a long, hard time for me to finally decide to try a cheesecake with a little less cherry in it. (With some more cherry Kool-Aid mix, though, this cheesecake probably would have become a "cherry-holic's" delight.)

PROTOTYPE 17

Enclosed in the Kool-Aid can that I bought was a measuring scoop. The instructions said to use one such scoop for every 2 cups of water in order to make the Kool-Aid beverage itself. I also found some useful information on the container concerning the size of the measuring scoop. It indicated that each scoop held 1/4 of a cup, less 1/2 of a tablespoon. I compared this scoop to an actual 1/4-cup measuring cup and found it to be more like 1/4 of a cup, less one (or a little more than one) whole tablespoon! Maybe I was dealing with another deflated measuring utensil, but I still decided to give it a try. Using prototype 3, add one of these Kool-Aid-supplied measuring scoops of the cherry drink mix (assuming that one such scoop had to be combined with one pint of water in order to correctly make the drink itself).

Comments: This time, the cherry flavor was too weak!

PROTOTYPE 18

Alright, we're going to do things differently this time! Measure 1/4 of a cup of the cherry drink mix, and then manually take away 1/2 of a tablespoon from it. Combine the rest of the mix with prototype 3 (and put the removed 1/2 tablespoon back in the Kool-Aid can, or get rid of it). Do *not* rely upon the Kool-Aid-supplied measuring scoop to provide the same measurement.

Comments: We finally have got a decent cherry cheesecake! Both the cherry and the cheese flavors were sufficiently present in the taste tests here. Now that I had a cherry prototype that was good enough to satisfy me, I anxiously looked forward to the next cheesecake . . .

PROTOTYPE 19

Okay, this is it. *This* is the dream prototype that I was referring to back in prototype 16, where I insisted on a decent-tasting, cherry-flavored, cheesecake batter. The intent here is to make a “black forest” marble cheesecake (assuming that the term refers to a combination of cherry and chocolate). I guess that one could also call this prototype the “3CH” marble cake (meaning CHeese, CHerry and CHocolate). This is a combination of prototypes 10 and 18, and it amounts to a cake that is about twice as high as my previous prototypes. The first step involves preparing a double quantity mixture of all the ingredients that these two cheesecakes have in common. Here is the doubled list:

- 1 quart of lowfat cottage cheese
- 4 tablespoons of Fleischmann’s Light (or margarine)
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup of sugar
- 1 cup of skim milk
- 1/2 cup of flour
- 1 teaspoon of salt

The next step is to reserve half of this prepared mixture (which I have found to be about 28 fluid ounces, at least according to the blender that I used) for the cherry batter. Reserve the other half for the chocolate. To the “cherry” half, add 1/4 of a teaspoon of lemon peel, 1 teaspoon of lemon juice and 1/4 of a cup minus 1/2 of a tablespoon of cherry Kool-Aid drink mix (and be sure to do it like I did it in prototype 18 - don’t trust that scoop). To the “chocolate” half, add 3 tablespoons of cocoa powder and an additional 3/8 of a cup of sugar. What I next did was put the cherry batter into the pan, and then I added the chocolate. But the chocolate batter seemed to have a tendency to sink, thus the “marbling” didn’t come out too well. I baked this cheesecake for about 95-100 minutes, and then, instead of taking it immediately out of the oven, I shut off the heat and let the cake sit in there for about an hour while leaving the oven door slightly ajar.

Comments: The resulting pattern was primarily chocolate in the middle and cherry on the outside. This prototype also did not seem to be firm enough. Being disappointed with the outcome, I didn’t seem to very much enjoy eating this cheesecake. Otherwise, the taste was probably as good as usual.

PROTOTYPE 20

Repeat prototype 19, but this time boost the flour by 2 tablespoons (hence bringing it to 1/2 of a cup plus 2 tablespoons). I also decided to give up the marbling attempt and opt instead for a “two layer” cheesecake - one flavor on the bottom and the other one on the top. Assuming that the chocolate batter was heavier than the cherry one, I put the chocolate one into the pan first. But when I afterwards added the cherry batter, it sunk into the chocolate one (or at least seemed to do so). Was one of the batters lighter than the other?? I wasn’t sure. Deciding to take another try at marbling, I stirred the batters around in the pan quite a bit (a lot more than I did in prototype 19). I then baked this cake in pretty much the same way as I did with prototype 19 (that includes the one-hour oven cooldown).

Comments: Guess what!? The two batters separated almost fully during the baking! Almost all of the cherry batter floated back up towards the top as the chocolate ended up occupying primarily the bottom. A “fuzzy line” separated the two batter colors (brown and pink). Nevertheless, I enjoyed this cheesecake more than the last one before it.