

JANE LEVI

Amandine



Whenever I smell spring in an English garden my Nanna is there, with her distinctive, infectious laugh ringing out, and preparations for the next meal in full swing. Combining with the fresh scent of new growth and damp earth warming in the pale sunshine, I have an overwhelming sense of the odours of Sunday lunch: lamb roasting, garden mint being picked and chopped for mint sauce, and the rubbing together of fat and flour for her pastry, usually for an apple pie or a Bakewell tart. I can hear the click of the cold corner larder door as it shuts, the sound of my feet on the back step from the kitchen as I skip off to fetch the herbs. Helpings were generous, seconds obligatory, and acceptance of thirds met with beaming approval (although she did recount with shocked amazement the time three of my half-French cousins demolished an entire fruit-cake in one sitting. Even by her standards this was appetite and appreciation taken to the extreme). In my memory, every meal at her house was a celebration of plenty and of family. She loved us, she loved to cook, and she loved more than anything to cook for us and eat with us.

Of all the good things she made, even greater than the cakes and the roasts, her pastry was legendary. It was light and crisp. It both held its shape and crumbled meltingly. It was palely golden; not too thick and not too thin. It topped pies and enclosed tarts, sweet and savoury, and was unfailingly perfect. She said my cool hands meant I was as able as she to make great pastry, but it honestly isn't the same. So I don't do it. Instead of Nanna's Bakewell tart, I make my own version of Amandine, a combination of almond cake and dessert, and I serve it with a fruit compote, a nod to her jammy layer. Like most of her cooking, this recipe is far too simple to credibly produce something so exquisite, and it never fails.



Prepare a 23cm / 9 in deep flan tin. Fluted edges look pretty. You can either butter it well or line it with foil. I prefer the latter but if you like a slight buttery taste, choose the former. For a smaller cake halve the quantities and use a 17cm / 6½ in tin.

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F/gas 4. Don't use the fan if your oven has one.

- 6 eggs
- 450g / 2 cups ground almonds
- 450g / 2 cups caster sugar (vanilla sugar if you have it)
- 210ml / 7oz milk
- 5 drops vanilla essence (optional)
- 60g / ¼ cup pine nuts

Mix all of the ingredients apart from the pine nuts together in a large mixing bowl. It will be a fairly wet batter. Pour into the prepared tin, sprinkle the pine nuts on top, and bake in the oven for 1¼ – 1½ hours until risen, golden, and no longer sticky when a skewer is inserted in the middle.

Cool, remove from the tin, and serve either alone, with fruit or fruit compote and crème fraîche.

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