



Kitchen Cheat Sheet: Gooey Pumpkin Bars

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Tips and Time Savers

- Remember, at the grocery store, look for pure pumpkin puree. Pumpkin pie filling is not the same thing, though it looks similar.
- Don't opt for low-fat cream cheese. It's too watery and not as tasty.
- Use the paddle attachment, not the whisk. Otherwise, you'll add too much air into the batter. Gooey cake tastes best when it's a little dense.
- I prefer butter to grease my dish, but cooking spray works too.
- Press the cake batter firmly into the corners of your baking dish. This way, the top layer won't spill over the edges, and you'll have pretty bars!
- Don't put a piping hot baking dish into the fridge to cool. It can ruin other sensitive fridge items, and you risk shattering the glass.
- Don't overcook these dessert bars, or they'll lose that gooey, soft texture. The best way to check for doneness is to look for a slight wiggle in the center of the pan—however, the bars shouldn't be wet.

Storage

Refrigerate

Cover the bars with plastic wrap or aluminum foil and store 'em in the fridge for up to 5 days. I like to separate each slice with some wax paper so the soft crust doesn't stick to the pumpkin mixture.

Heads up: because of the gooey layer, you can't safely store these at room temperature.

Freeze

To make them last a little longer, transfer the pumpkin gooey bars to an airtight container, and freeze for up to 3 months.

The best way to do this is to flash-freeze the bars. Place the cooled, cut pumpkin bars on a baking sheet and put in the freezer for 2 hours or until firm and frozen.

Now, they store super easily.

You can add each bar individually to a small Ziploc bag for individual servings that you can just toss in the kids' lunches.

Or, you can place them in layers in an airtight container with parchment between the layers. They won't stick together so you can grab one or two easily.

Variations

- Spice cake mix goes great with rich pumpkin flavors, but you can swap it for another kind. Chocolate, yellow, and white cake mix work just fine.
- Feel free to use homemade pumpkin puree. Just be sure to drain it well so that your gooey pumpkin bars bake with the right texture.
- Make your own pumpkin pie spice using my tried-and-true blend: 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 1/2 teaspoon ginger, 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt or 1/4 teaspoon table salt, 1/4 tsp cloves, and a pinch of ground chipotle—the chipotle's optional, but it adds a subtle, Southern warmth.

FAQs

Can I use a different cake mix flavor?

Sure can. Spice cake is the star of this show, but if your pantry's playing hard to get, yellow cake, butter pecan, or whatever. Just know it'll change the flavor—but sometimes chaos in the kitchen leads to greatness. Just don't come crying to me if you try Funfetti. That's between you and your therapist.

Do I really have to sift the powdered sugar?

Technically? No. Emotionally and texturally? Yes. Sifting breaks up the lumps and helps the filling stay smooth and silky, like it's supposed to. Skip it if you enjoy mystery sugar bombs in your mouth. Some folks do.

Why can't I store these at room temp?

Because science. AND food poisoning. That cream cheese filling is too gooey and delicate to be trusted on the counter—especially in a Texas kitchen. Into the fridge they go. They'll keep for up to five days (assuming no one sneaks a piece at midnight).

Can I freeze them for later?

Absolutely. In fact, I encourage it. Freeze individual bars for grab-and-go lunchbox wins or hoard the whole pan for future carb emergencies. Just make sure they're cooled completely, wrapped tight, and stored like the precious gems they are.

Can I double the recipe?

You bet—but use two pans. Don't try to MacGyver this into a sheet pan unless you want sad, underbaked goo soup. This recipe is magic, but it still obeys the laws of physics.

Help! I didn't soften the butter!

If you forgot to pull the butter and cream cheese out of the fridge to soften, no worries. This ooey gooey pumpkin cake recipe is very forgiving. Simply warm the butter or cream cheese in the microwave using 50% power until just soft—be sure to rotate every ten seconds or so, and don't let it melt.

What are gooey butter cake bars?

Traditional butter bars are a Midwest classic, though we have adopted 'em here in the South, too. The dense, cake-like treat uses a lot of butter, giving it a very soft, moist texture that tastes gooey and rich.

Nice to have

As an Amazon Associate, I earn commission from qualifying purchases.

If you want perfectly even bars without eyeballing it like a stressed-out lunch lady, this 1.5" x 2.5" multi cookie cutter is pure magic. It cuts an entire 9x9 pan into uniform squares in one satisfying press—no measuring, no math, just beautiful, bakery-worthy results. I use it when I want my cookie bars to look professionally portioned (or when I'm pretending to share). Bonus: it's dishwasher safe and fits neatly in a drawer. [Grab it here](#) and thank me later.