



Kitchen Cheat Sheet: Carrot Poke Cake

RESTLESSCHIPOTLE.COM | SOUTHERN COMFORT FOOD

Tips and Time Savers

- Use the handle of a wooden spoon or a thick straw to poke the holes. Toothpicks are useless here and will only lead to pudding frustration.
- Pour the pudding on while the cake is still warm, not hot and not cold. Warm cake drinks it up. Cold cake ignores you.
- Let the pudding sit for a minute after whisking so it thickens slightly, then pour. Too thin runs everywhere, too thick just sulks on top.
- Spread the whipped topping all the way to the edges so the cake stays moist and doesn't dry out in the fridge.
- Chill it long enough to slice cleanly. Overnight is best if you've got the willpower.
- Toast the pecans for a few minutes if you want extra flavor and crunch. It's optional but makes people think you did something fancy.

Storage

Cover the carrot cake poke cake tightly with plastic wrap or a lid and store it in the refrigerator. Because of the pudding and whipped topping, it needs to stay chilled. It will keep well for up to 4 days, and the flavor actually deepens after the first day, making it an excellent make-ahead dessert for Easter or potlucks.

If you're transporting it, keep it cold until serving time so the creamy layers stay set and slice cleanly.

Freezing

Freezing the fully assembled poke cake isn't ideal. The pudding and Cool Whip can separate and become watery once thawed.

If you want to freeze it, freeze the baked carrot cake before poking the holes and adding the filling. Wrap it tightly in plastic wrap and foil and freeze for up to 2 months. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator, then poke, fill, top, and chill as directed.

That way you still get the creamy texture without sacrificing quality.

Variations

Make it extra carrot-y

Stir a handful of finely shredded carrots into the batter before baking. It bumps up the homemade vibe and adds a little texture.

Add pineapple for old-school flavor

Mix a half cup of well-drained crushed pineapple into the batter. It adds sweetness and keeps the cake even more tender. Very retro. Very good.

Swap the pudding flavor

Use vanilla or white chocolate pudding instead of cheesecake for a softer, sweeter filling. Still creamy, just a slightly different personality.

Use cream cheese frosting instead of Cool Whip

If you want a richer, bakery-style finish, spread a thin layer of cream cheese frosting over the chilled cake. It turns the whole thing into a hybrid between poke cake and classic carrot cake.

Add coconut for texture

Sprinkle sweetened shredded coconut over the top with the pecans for a little extra chew and a hint of tropical energy.

Make it nut-free

Skip the pecans or replace them with toasted coconut or crushed graham crackers for crunch without the nuts.

FAQs

Can I make carrot cake poke cake ahead of time?

Yes, and you should. This is a classic make-ahead dessert. It actually gets better after chilling for several hours or overnight because the pudding settles into the cake and everything turns extra moist and creamy.

How long does carrot cake poke cake need to chill?

At least 3–4 hours, but overnight is ideal. That gives the filling time to soak in properly so you get clean slices instead of pudding drift.

Can I use homemade carrot cake instead of a mix?

Absolutely. Just bake it in a 9×13 pan and follow the same poking and filling steps. The rest of the recipe works exactly the same.

Can I use cream cheese frosting instead of Cool Whip?

You can, but it changes the texture. Cool Whip keeps it light and fluffy, while frosting makes it richer and more like a traditional carrot cake. Both are good... just different moods.

How do I store carrot cake poke cake?

Keep it covered in the refrigerator. It'll stay fresh for about 4 days, and honestly it's usually even better on day two.

Can I freeze carrot cake poke cake?

Freezing isn't ideal once the pudding and whipped topping are added since the texture can separate. If you want to freeze, freeze the baked cake before poking and assemble later.

Do I have to use pecans?

Nope. Leave them off, swap in walnuts, or add toasted coconut if you're feeling fancy. The cake works either way.