

# PLUM & BLACK PEPPER CAKE

1 cup (225 g) unsalted butter, room temperature

1 cup plus 2 tbsp (225 g) superfine/caster sugar

½ tsp vanilla bean paste

4 tsp (8 g) coarsely ground black pepper, divided

3 eggs

½ cup (65 g) all-purpose flour, plus extra if needed

2 cups (200 g) ground almonds

1 tsp baking powder

¼ cup (60 ml) milk

4–6 ripe plums, pitted and quartered

Handful of flaked almonds

1 tbsp (15 g) apricot jam, to decorate (optional)

Crème fraîche, for serving

Black pepper partners up beautifully with a variety of fruit—in particular, plums—adding an unexpected, but welcome twist. It won't make the cake spicy but instead brings a subtle warmth that balances out the tartness of the fruit. Not wanting to hide those gorgeous plums peeking through the sponge with unnecessary frosting, I've left this cake perfectly naked, which I feel also adds to its charm. Simply serve slightly warm with a good dollop of crème fraîche.

YIELD: 8 – 10 SERVINGS

---

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Grease a springform or loose-bottomed 9-inch (23-cm) cake pan and line the bottom with parchment paper.

Using a stand mixer or electric whisk, beat the butter, sugar, vanilla and 2 teaspoons (4 g) of the black pepper until pale and fluffy. Beat in the eggs one at a time, and if the mixture starts to curdle, add 1 tablespoon (8 g) of flour. In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, ground almonds, baking powder and 1 teaspoon of black pepper. Add this gradually into the butter mixture, followed by the milk, and gently stir until combined before pouring the batter into the prepared pan. Arrange the plum quarters on top, working your way around without pushing them too much into the batter. Sprinkle on the remaining black pepper and the flaked almonds.

Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean. Cool for 15 minutes in the pan before turning it out onto a wire rack to cool. Brush with some warmed apricot jam, if using, to give the cake a glazed finish before serving warm or cold, with a dollop of crème fraîche.