

Giving of Yourself & The Art of Cheesecake



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Christmas has come and gone once again, and I can honestly say this year left my heart full of joy. It was a crazy

season, for sure. I convinced myself—and my somewhat skeptical husband—that we could have it all this Christmas.

We wanted to hear our daughter perform on Christmas Eve in Pueblo, Colorado, then drive to Denver for Christmas Eve service and dinner with our son and his family. We welcomed Santa on Christmas morning and entertained both families for Christmas dinner that evening. And, as if that weren't enough for what some might consider "at our age," we boarded a plane the morning of December 26 and headed to England to visit our other son and his family.

I must say—we did it. And my heart is bursting with joy.

For those of you who know me well, it will come as no surprise that I dropped food for everyone along the way. Chili, tamales, beef tenderloin, stuffed peppers—and lots and lots of sweets. The one dessert requested at nearly every stop was the ever-so-humble cheesecake. It travels remarkably well.



▲ Sydney and Margaret McKinley, Granddaughters



Not to London, but it arrived at every other destination in perfect condition.

With all this excitement—and these small feats of strength—behind me, I decided it was finally time for a few New Year's resolutions.

First, to make the effort to contact people I have neglected for far too long. It takes intention, but it is always worth it.

Second, to use the phone for conversation instead of texting. I am terrible at communicating over text, and I suspect I've lost more than a few friends to words misinterpreted on a screen.

And lastly—patience and restraint. I suffer from both. Which brings me back to cheesecake.

The Art of Cheesecake

From Ancient Roots to Perfect Modern Technique

Making a cheesecake is easy. Making a *great* cheesecake, however, is a test of patience and restraint. Cheesecake is deceptively simple: a short list of ingredients—cream cheese, eggs, sugar, cream—transformed into something luxurious. Yet this humble dessert demands care. Rush it, overmix it, or overbake it, and it will remind you why restraint matters.

Why (and How) to Use a Water Bath

At its core, cheesecake is a custard. Custards require gentle, even heat. Without moisture in the oven, the exterior bakes faster than the center, leading to cracks, curdling, or a dry texture.

Why a Water Bath Matters

A water bath:

- Regulates oven temperature
- Adds humidity to prevent cracking
- Produces a silky, creamy interior
- Ensures even baking from edge to center

How to Do It Correctly

1. Wrap a springform pan tightly in two to three layers of heavy-duty foil.
2. Place the pan inside a large roasting pan.
3. Pour hot (not boiling) water into the roasting pan until it reaches halfway up the sides of the springform.
4. Bake at 300–325°F for slow, even cooking.
5. Cool gradually with the oven door cracked to prevent temperature shock.

Cheesecake Bars

Same Rules, Slight Tweaks

I love a cheesecake bar or bite. It follows many of the same rules as a traditional cheesecake, with a little more flexibility—easier transport, simpler slicing, and perfect portions for sharing.

Key differences:

- Use a **9x13-inch pan**, lined with parchment
- Reduce baking time by **15–25 minutes**
- A water bath is optional, but recommended for thicker bars
- Chill completely before slicing for clean edges

Other Tips for the Perfect Cheesecake

- Use room-temperature ingredients for a smooth batter (*I prefer Philadelphia cream cheese—just FYI*)
- Mix on low speed to avoid incorporating air
- Scrape the bowl often
- Bake until edges are set and the center gently wobbles
- Cool slowly, then chill fully—at least six hours, preferably overnight (*This is a must. Hence: patience.*)

Common Cheesecake Mistakes

- Overbeating the eggs
- Baking at too high a temperature
- Skipping the water bath
- Cutting before fully chilled
- Rushing the cooling process

Tricks I've Learned Along the Way

- Always use full-fat cream cheese
- Tap the pan lightly to release air bubbles
- Use a hot, clean knife for slicing
- Keep garnishes simple and intentional



CLASSIC NEW YORK CHEESECAKE

Serves 10-12

Crust

1½ C. graham cracker crumbs
(I often use ½ graham cracker
crumbs and ½ gingersnap
crumbs)
¼ C. granulated sugar
6 T. butter, melted

Filling

2½ lbs (5 blocks) full-fat cream
cheese, room temperature
1¾ C. granulated sugar
3 T. all-purpose flour
1 tsp salt
1 T. vanilla extract
½ C. sour cream
½ C. heavy cream
5 large eggs, room temperature

1. Heat oven to 325°F. Grease a 9-inch springform pan.
2. Combine crust ingredients; press firmly into pan. Bake 10 minutes. Cool.
3. Beat cream cheese on low until smooth. Add sugar, flour, and salt.
4. Blend in vanilla, sour cream, and cream.
5. Add eggs one at a time, mixing gently.
6. Assemble water bath and bake 75–90 minutes, until edges are set and center jiggles slightly.
7. Cool in oven 1 hour with door cracked. (The cake can stay longer with heat off if needed.)
8. Chill overnight.
9. Run a knife around the edge, unlock, and remove the ring.

I freeze leftover cheesecake—it keeps beautifully in both the freezer and refrigerator.



OREO CHEESECAKE BARS

Makes 16 servings

1 pkg (1 lb 2 oz) Oreo cookies
(30 for the crust; the rest go
into the batter)

¼ C. butter or margarine, melted
4 (8-oz) packages cream cheese,
softened

1. Heat oven to 325°F.
2. Process 30 cookies until finely ground. Mix with melted butter. Press into a 13×9-inch pan.
3. Beat cream cheese, sugar, and vanilla until smooth.
4. Add sour cream, then eggs one at a time.
5. Chop remaining cookies. Fold 1½ cups into batter.
6. Pour over crust; sprinkle remaining cookies on top.
7. Bake 45 minutes, until center is almost set.
8. Cool, then refrigerate 4 hours or overnight.
(I freeze mine.)
9. Cut into 16 pieces.

1 C. sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
1 C. sour cream
4 eggs

KEY LIME CHEESECAKE

Crust

1½ C. graham cracker crumbs or gingersnaps
½ C. sugar
½ C. butter, melted

Bake at 350°F for 8–10 minutes in a 9–10 inch springform pan.

Filling

2 lbs cream cheese (4 packages)
2 C. sugar
6 eggs
¼ C. butter, melted and cooled
1 T. vanilla
3 T. flour
¼ C. bottled key lime juice

Bake at 325°F for 30 minutes, then reduce to 250°F and bake 1 hour. Turn oven off and cool inside for 1 hour. Freeze at this point.

Passion Fruit Curd

¾ C. passion fruit pulp (frozen section at Walmart)
2 whole eggs
2 egg yolks
½ C. sugar
½ stick cold butter

Cook gently until thickened, then stir in butter. Chill and serve over cheesecake.

JUNIOR'S BROWNIE SWIRL CHEESECAKE

A longtime favorite from Junior's Famous Cheesecakes of NYC.
Published by Leite's Culinaria.

"This is a recipe I have used for years. It comes from Juniors favorite cheesecakes in NYC. It was published in Leites Culinaria several years ago and it is great. They ask you give them mention if you print a recipe of theirs."

Brownie Crust and Chunks

8 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate
2 sticks unsalted butter
1-1/2 C. all-purpose flour
1 tsp. salt
6 extra-large eggs
2 C. sugar
1 T. vanilla extract

Cheesecake

Three (8-oz) packages cream cheese, (use only full fat), at room temperature
1 1/3 C. sugar
3 T. cornstarch
1 T. vanilla extract
2 extra-large eggs
2/3 C. heavy cream, plus 1 T. for brushing (optional)
2 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate
1 C. coarsely chopped walnuts, (optional)

Make the brownie crust and chunks

Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C). Generously butter the bottom and sides of a 9-inch springform pan and an 8-inch square baking pan. Line the baking pan (but not the springform) with parchment or waxed paper, leaving a 1-inch overhang over the sides. Wrap the outside of the springform with aluminum foil, covering the bottom and extending all the way up the sides.

In a small saucepan over medium heat, melt the chocolate with the butter and let cool.

In a small bowl, combine the flour and salt. In a large bowl, beat the eggs with an electric mixer on high until light yellow and thick, 3 to 5 minutes. With the mixer still running, gradually add the sugar, then the chocolate mixture and vanilla. Reduce the speed to low and blend in the flour mixture just until it disappears.

Spread 2 C. of the batter in the springform to make the crust and spread the rest in the baking pan. Bake just until set around the sides, 15 to 20 minutes for the springform pan and 30 to 35 minutes for the baking pan. (The centers will still be slightly soft.)

Let the brownies cool on a wire rack for 1 hour. Leave the brownie crust in the springform. Lift the brownies out of the square pan onto a plate, using the paper hanging over the sides as handles. Cover both the crust and the square of brownies with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.

Cut the square of brownies with a serrated knife into 3/4-inch squares.

Make the cheesecake batter

In the bowl of a stand mixer or in a large bowl with a handheld electric mixer, dump 1 package of the cream cheese, 1/3 C. of the sugar, and the cornstarch. Beat on low until creamy, about 3 minutes, scraping down the bowl several times. Blend in the remaining cream cheese, 1 package at a time, scraping down the bowl after each addition.

Increase the speed to medium and beat in first the remaining 1 C. sugar and then the vanilla. Blend in the eggs, 1 at a time, beating well after adding each one. Beat in the 2/3 C. of cream just until completely blended. Don't overmix!

Transfer 1 C. of the batter to a small bowl and set aside for the chocolate swirls.

Assemble the brownie swirl cheesecake

Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C).

Cover the chocolate brownie crust in the pan with small brownie bites (12 to 16), covering as much of the crust as possible. Use only 1 layer of brownies. (Yep. You get to nosh on the rest of the brownies!) Gently spoon the cheesecake batter over the brownie bites.

Now make the chocolate swirls. Melt the chocolate and stir into the reserved white batter until completely blended. Using a teaspoon, drop the chocolate batter on top of the white batter, pushing it down slightly as you go. Using a thin, pointed knife, cut through the batter a few times in a swirling figure eight design, just until chocolate swirls appear.

Place the cake in a large shallow roasting pan. Pull out the oven rack a couple inches and place the pan on the rack. Carefully add enough hot water to the pan to reach 1 inch up the sides of the springform. Slide the rack back in the oven and bake until the edges are light golden brown and the top of the cake has golden and dark chocolate swirls, about 1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and 25 minutes. If the cake seems to be browning too much, loosely cover the pan with aluminum foil.

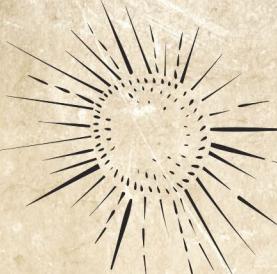
Remove the cake from the water bath, transfer to a wire rack, and let it cool completely, about 2 hours. (Just walk away so you're not tempted to fuss with it.)

Leave the cheesecake in the pan, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until completely cold, at least 4 hours and preferably overnight.

To serve, release and remove the sides of the springform pan, leaving the cake on the bottom of the pan. Place on a cake plate.

If using walnuts, brush the remaining 1 T. cream in a 1-inch border around the top edge of the cake (this helps keep the nuts in place). Sprinkle the walnuts over the cream, pressing the nuts down gently, making a 1-inch border around the top outside edge.

Refrigerate until ready to serve. Slice with a sharp straight-edge knife, not a serrated one. Cover leftover cake and refrigerate, or freeze up to 1 month. *AW*



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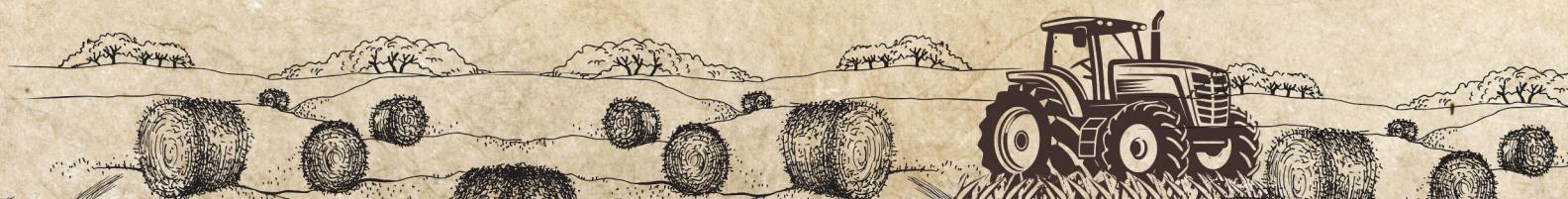
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High Plains Toy and Antique Tractor Show

7th Annual

Friday February 20th & Saturday 21st, 2026

Tri-State Fair Grounds, Rex Baxter Building 3301 SE 10th Ave, Amarillo, TX 79104

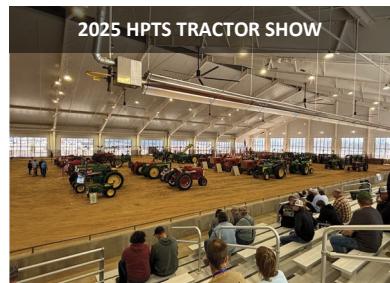
Founded in 2019 by friends passionate about farm toys, the High Plains Toy and Antique Tractor Show (HPTS) quickly became popular in Amarillo. Originally held at Cole Community Center in Canyon, growing demand led HPTS to move to West Texas A&M University's Piehl-Schaeffer Pavilion in 2023, providing space for more vendors and exhibits—including an expanded antique tractor display in Bain Event Center. The partnership with WT and organizations like Texas Farm Bureau and Collegiate FFA promoted community involvement, with college students volunteering at activities such as the Pedal Pull and concessions.



HPTS gives back by donating all admission and concession proceeds, and hosts an annual silent auction to support local organizations like The Hope and Healing Place, contributing over \$5,000 to date. Each March, the two-day event draws 600-700 visitors with custom model toys, vintage literature, handmade crafts, and nearly 90 vendor tables—some run by kids. Competitions include toy build-offs and farm display contests, with winners advancing to national shows.



The antique tractor show features a range of restored machines and offers opportunities for attendees of all ages to share stories and celebrate agricultural heritage. HPTS brings together people from diverse backgrounds, fostering tradition, innovation, and community connection.



2026 Show Update:

The next annual show will be held at the Rex Baxter building at Tri-State Fairgrounds in Amarillo, allowing both the Antique Tractors and Toy Show to be featured together in a larger, unified space.



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