

Bakery Cakes vs. Scratch Cakes

The Guardian Guide to Baking

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I have worked in bakeries and some even said "We Bake from Scratch". Ask others that are using a cake mix, they will say they are baking from scratch. I guess that if you put it into the oven you baked from scratch. Also, using a mix as your base adding other items, people think they just baked from scratch.

Most bought baked goods are not only full of chemical additives but often pretty old by the time we eat them.

To buy cakes, breads, and pastries in supermarkets and convenience stores is to step out of the comforting domestic kitchen and into the food industry's science lab. Here, men in white coats have spent years working out how they can take raw ingredients apart, then put them back together again in a more effective and nutritionally impoverished form. The majority of shop-bought baked products are made using cheap commodity oils or artery-clogging, chemically hardened oils such as soy and palm, the plants for which

are likely to have been grown on what was once a lush rainforest. That sad, soggy sliced loaf comes with obscure emulsifiers, soya flour, vinegar, and enzyme-based crumb softeners derived from animals, fungi, cereals, and bacteria. Some of these won't show up in the list of ingredients because they are deemed, conveniently, to be "processing aids".

Few bakery products are quite what they seem. Rarely are they made with freshly shelled eggs; instead, dried egg powders and long-life, pre-shelled mixes are the norm. That lemon drizzle cake in your basket might be made with pre-prepared pasteurized lemon zest and lemon "concentrate" in place of fresh zest and juice. Your croissant may owe its smell, not to real butter, but synthetic butter flavoring.

And as if this armory of additives weren't offputting enough, the packaging of many baked goods is a disaster in environmental terms. A typical birthday cake comes in a cardboard and plastic sleeve and sits on a cardboard disc coated with thin metal: difficult, if not impossible, to recycle.

Who needs it? Home baking is a piece of cake once you get into it. Fresh, warm, wholesome, and made in minutes - you'd be a fool not to.

Typical ingredients for Home-baked cake:

Butter

Sugar

Freshly shelled eggs

Wheat flour: self-raising, or plain with baking powder (bicarbonate of soda and cream of tartar)

Salt

Cocoa Powder

Flavorings (Natural oil)

Typical ingredients for Store purchased cake

Butter (only in a minority of cakes)

Margarine (made from chemically hardened oils such as palm)

Sugar

Glucose

Fructose

Invert sugar syrup

Dried egg powder

Skimmed milk powder

Wheat flour

Cornflour

Modified maize starch

Modified tapioca starch

Soya flour

Raising agents (disodium diphosphate, sodium hydrogen carbonate, calcium carbonate)

Glycerol (a humectant to keep cake moist longer)

Emulsifiers (acacia gum, mono- and diglycerides of fatty acids, calcium stearoyl-2-lactylate, polyglycerol esters of fatty acids)

Acidity regulators (sodium citrates, citric acid)

Flavorings, usually synthetic

Colouring (anthocyanins)

Preservative (potassium sorbate)

Stabilizers (xanthan gum, tragacanth)

Salt

Which would you like to eat? The bakery cake may last a few days longer, but a scratch cake will be devoured faster.