Chocolate-Beet Snack Cake with Cream Cheese Frosting

Farmstand Fresh (from the publishers of Fine Cooking)

*To make this a layer cake, divide the batter among three 8-inch-round cake pans lined with parchment paper. Reduce the baking time to about 25 minutes.

Ingredients (for the cake)

- 4 medium beets, scrubbed
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons canola oil; more for the beets
- 2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup unsweetened natural cocoa powder
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Ingredients (for the cream cheese frosting)

- 1 pound cream cheese, softened at room temperature
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
- 3 cups confectioners' sugar
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Pinch of kosher salt

Instructions (cake)

1. Heat the oven to 375°F. Cut the greens and root end of the beets, leaving about 1 inch of the stems attached. This will keep the beets from bleeding while being cooked. (Save the greens for a salad.) Lightly rub canola oil over each beet and put them in a roasting pan with a tight-fitting lid or cover with foil. Roast until completely tender when poked with a fork, 45 to 60 minutes. Let cool, and then rub or peel off the skins. Run the beets through the medium disk of a food processor to shred them, or grate them on the large holes of a box grater. Measure out 1½ cups.

2. Reduce the oven to 350°F; butter and flour a 9 x 13-inch baking pan.
3. Combine the flour, baking soda, salt, and cocoa in a medium bowl and whisk to blend thoroughly. Put the eggs, sugar, canola oil, and vanilla in a large bowl, and beat at medium speed with an electric mixer until well blended, 2 to 3 minutes. Slowly beat in the dry ingredients, mixing only until just blended. Fold in the grated beets by hand.
4. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top. Bake until the cake bounces back when you press lightly with your finger, 30 to 40 minutes. Set the pan on a rack to cool.

Instructions (frosting)

1 Beat the cream cheese and butter together with the mixer until smooth, about 1 minute. With the mixer on low, slowly add the sugar. Once all the sugar is incorporated, increase the mixer speed to high and beat until light and fluffy and no lumps remain. Beat in the lemon juice, vanilla, and salt.

Finish the cake

Spread the cooled cake with the frosting and cut into squares.