

We've had dueling pumpkin bars at Vala's ever since the Big Barn Bakery opened in the exit barn. The Country Bakery has been making the same recipe since I was at least a teenager. But, surprisingly, the recipes are almost identical except for the spice profile -- the Country Bakery uses just cinnamon while the exit barn bakery uses classic pumpkin pie spices. I've included the more spiced up version here, since this is my personal preference, but you should feel free to experiment with the spices until you discover your favorite version.

RECIPE: Pumpkin Bars

4 eggs
1 cup vegetable oil
1 2/3 cups sugar
2 cups pumpkin puree
2 cups flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ginger
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon cloves

For the Frosting:

8 ounces cream cheese, room temperature
1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, room temperature
3 cups powdered sugar, sifted
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Oil a half sheet pan (18x13).

In a medium bowl, stir together the eggs, oil, sugar, and pumpkin until combined. In a separate large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, ginger, cloves and nutmeg. Add the pumpkin mixture to the flour mixture and stir until combined. Spread evenly into the prepared pan.

Bake for 20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the bars comes out clean. Cool the bars completely before frosting.

For the Frosting:

Beat the cream cheese and butter with an electric mixer on medium speed until smooth. Then turn the mixer down to low speed and mix in the powdered sugar. Stir in the vanilla and keep mixing until the frosting is smooth.

A Note About Pan Sizes: This recipe works great in a standard half sheet pan, 18x13, but you can also bake it in two 13x9 inch baking dishes. Or, if you want more of a pumpkin cake vs. a bar, bake it in one 13x9 inch baking dishes and bake 25-30 minutes.