



These multilayered treats feature a cookie crust; a soft, tangy-sweet filling; and a crackly top.

added richness and contributed to the pale yellow color), needed no prebaking and had just the right pudding-like consistency—think cheesecake but with a bit more jiggle. It also added a lovely tangy flavor to counter the sweetness. And for that gorgeous, crackly, meringue-like top? The egg whites managed to create that all by themselves in the oven, with no extra nudges from me.

If you have a sweet tooth like I do, these bars hit all the creamy, tangy, sweet notes you crave. And they're almost too pretty to eat.

Almost.



A Crackly Top

The filling cracks around the edges as the bars cool and will crack even more when you cut them—and that's OK. The cracks are a natural result of the baked custard and, once dusted with confectioners' sugar, contribute to these bars' signature appearance.

FILLING

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened**
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- 4 cups (1 pound) confectioners' sugar, plus extra for dusting**
- 2 large eggs plus 2 large yolks**
- 2 tablespoons vanilla extract**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Make foil sling for 13 by 9-inch baking pan by folding 2 long sheets of aluminum foil; first sheet should be 13 inches wide and second sheet should be 9 inches wide. Lay sheets of foil in pan perpendicular to each other, with extra foil hanging over edges of pan. Push foil into corners and up sides of pan, smoothing foil flush to pan. Spray foil with vegetable oil spray.

2. FOR THE CRUST: Combine flour, sugar, and salt in bowl. Add melted butter and stir with rubber spatula until evenly moistened. Crumble dough over bottom of prepared pan. Using bottom of dry measuring cup, press dough into even layer. Using fork, poke dough all over, about 20 times. Bake until edges are light golden brown, about 20 minutes. Transfer pan to wire rack and let cool completely, about 30 minutes.

3. FOR THE FILLING: Combine cream cheese and butter in bowl of stand mixer fitted with paddle. With mixer running on low speed, slowly add sugar and mix until fully combined, about 1 minute, scraping down sides and bottom of bowl as needed. Increase speed to medium-high and mix until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes.

4. Reduce speed to low; add eggs and yolks, one at a time, and mix until incorporated. Add vanilla and salt and mix until incorporated, about 20 seconds, scraping down sides and bottom of bowl as needed. Increase speed to medium-high and mix until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes (mixture should have consistency of frosting). Spread filling evenly over cooled crust. Tap pan gently on counter to release air bubbles.

5. Bake until top is golden brown, edges have cracked, and center jiggles slightly when pan is gently shaken, about 30 minutes. Transfer pan to wire rack and let cool completely, at least 3 hours.

6. Using foil overhang, lift bars out of pan. Cut into 12 pieces. Dust with extra sugar and serve. (Bars can be stored in airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 days.)

GOOEY BUTTER CAKE BARS

Serves 10 to 12

A 2-pound bag of confectioners' sugar will yield enough for both the crust and filling with leftovers for dusting. Do not use a glass or ceramic baking dish here. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the mixer bowl with a rubber spatula as often as needed to make sure all the ingredients are fully combined.

CRUST

- 2½ cups (12½ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- ¾ cup (3 ounces) confectioners' sugar**
- ¾ teaspoon salt**
- 12 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**