**Carrot Cake. An amusement**

**September 2023**

The other morning a member of my dog-walk-and-coffee group happened to mention that the evening before he had eaten a large slice of carrot cake that had some kind of icing in the middle of it, he couldn’t say what it was. Seeking to identify the nature of the icing a general discussion was had as to what as consumers of the modern carrot cake its defining ingredients should be. The points of distinction of the carrot cake over other cakes came we thought down to just three essentials: carrot, walnuts and cream cheese topping. I put the question to my Facebook Friends also and they confirmed these three ingredients as essential and added a spice of some kind as the fourth essential.

The food historian in me wondered when carrot cake made its first appearance at the Australian table, in what guise, how it developed over the years and whether I could find a recipe that best corresponded to we consumers’ carrot cake. What follows is based on 37 recipes for carrot cake; 30 recipes found in newspapers and magazines via *Trove[[1]](#footnote-1)* covering the period 1909 (the first recipe for a carrot cake I found, see below*)* – 2020, and seven from cookbooks in my collection from 1844[[2]](#footnote-2) - 2020 (I surveyed in all 22 community contributory cookbooks, four product cookbooks and 15 generic cookery books - but only seven had a recipe for carrot cake. (See Appendix 1 Recipes surveyed for this article)

# The first carrot cake recipe published in Australia

For no particular reason I have always thought of carrot cake as a relatively recent invention – well, within the last 40 years or so at most. Imagine my surprise when *Trove* found this 1909 recipe.

Carrot Cheese-Cake

Choose some juicy carrots, clean them well, and lightly scrape off the outer surface. Grate a teacupful and add an equal quantity of fine breadcrumbs. Put into a good-sized basin, pour over a pint of boiling milk, and leave until cool. Beat in two eggs, a quarter of a pound of sugar, two ounces of raisins, stoned and chopped, a pinch of spice, and the strained juice and grated rind of a lemon. Line a shallow tin with short paste, lay in the mixture, cover over with paste, and bake in a good oven.[[3]](#footnote-3)

So 114 years ago there is a recipe for carrot cake that includes two of the ingredients of a carrot cake that would satisfy my consumer cohort: carrot and spice (undefined).

The cake seems to be a mash up of two types of dishes current at the time – carrot puddings and cheese-cakes.

Carrot Pudding (1870) is an excellent, institution. Dyspeptics take our word and insist upon having

it. Mix in a bowl half a pound of flour, half a pound of chopped suet, three-quarters of a pound of grated carrot a quarter of a pound of raisins, stoned, a quarter of a pound of currants, and a quarter of a pound of sugar, brown or sifted white. Place these in a mould or dish; beat up two whole eggs and the yokes (sic) of four in a gill of milk, grate a little nutmeg in, and add it to the former. Bake or steam forty -five minutes.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Almond Cheese-Cakes (1866)

The yolks of three eggs well beaten, a quarter of a pound of bitter and three-quarters of a pound of sweet almonds, and a quarter of a pound of sifted sugar. The almonds must be pounded, but not very finely. The eggs should be beaten to a cream, and the sugar mixed with them, and then the almonds added. To be put into tartlet tins lined with puff paste.[[5]](#footnote-5)

It borrows raisins and spice from the Carrot Pudding and paste/pastry lining and covering the baking tin from the Cheese-Cake.

Seven later recipes call for the addition of lemon rind and/or juice.[[6]](#footnote-6) Three use milk.[[7]](#footnote-7) No other recipes used breadcrumbs.

# In search of the essentials

I found just one other recipe for Carrot Cheese-Cake in 1931.[[8]](#footnote-8) Recipes for Carrot Pudding, on the other hand, continued to appear, the latest found in *Trove* appearing in 1951.[[9]](#footnote-9) Carrot Cake was moving in its own direction.

A recipe in the *Jewish Herald* of 1919 was the first I found that used spices.

Carrot Cake

Mix l oz. grated raw carrots, 4oz. grated-raw potatoes, and 4 oz matzo meal in a bowl, add 4 oz fine meal, two tablespoonfuls treacle, one teaspoonful of mixed spice. Then add to 1 gill of milk half-teaspoonful of bicarbonate, of soda and one egg; beat these well together and stir into the other ingredients. Put into greased small tins or one large tin, and bake; In a moderate oven.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Recipes surveyed for this article are as likely to use spices as not and when they do it is likely to be nutmeg.

Almonds and not walnuts were the first nuts I found being added to a carrot cake in a 1934 recipe.

Carrot Cake

Take 2 clean carrots of medium size, grate them, and place in a saucepan and let boil gently until cooked in half a cup of water. Add 1 tablespoon of grated lemon peel, and 1 tablespoon of juice, then add a tablespoon of butter, and cook for 10 minutes. Add 1 tablespoon of grated almonds, 1 cup of sultanas, 3 tablespoons of sugar, 7 granose biscuits, half a cup of milk, 3 large eggs. Put

all together in the saucepan. let simmer for 4 minutes on stove. Grease cake tin before putting in the mixture, and then cook the cakes in a moderate oven until well baked. Do not touch until they are cooked, which will be about three hours. The cakes must be a very dark golden color when cooked.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Granose biscuits used here are the predecessor to Weet Bix, the popular Australian breakfast dish.[[12]](#footnote-12) A 1982 recipe also used a popular breakfast dish, in this case muesli.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The first use of walnuts I found was in this 1971 recipe for Spicy Carrot Cake.

Spicy Carrot Cake

2 eggs

1 cup sugar

1 cup shredded raw carrot

¼ cup oil (maize)

½ cup chopped walnuts

1 ½ cups plain flour

pinch salt

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon bicarb soda

1 ½ teaspoons baking powder

Beat eggs lightly, add sugar, carrots, oil and nuts, mix well. Sift flour with salt, cinnamon, soda and baking powder, add dry ingredients gradually to egg mixture, beat until smooth.

Turn into a very lightly greased ring cake tin, bake in a moderate oven approximately 46 to 60 minutes or until cake springs back when touched lightly. Cool 10 minutes in tin, turn out onto wire rack to cool, spread frosting.[[14]](#footnote-14)

This recipe also had the first instructions for cream cheese frosting/icing

Frosting Cream

2 oz cream cheese

2 oz butter

pinch salt

vanilla

8 oz icing sugar

Cream together cheese and butter until light and fluffy, beat in salt and vanilla, gradually beat in the sifted icing sugar. Mix well until smooth.

This recipe for Spicy Carrot Cake was the first I found to include all four ingredients that would satisfy my consumer cohort’s essentials for a carrot cake – carrot, walnuts, spice and cream cheese topping.

**An aside**

# The most outré recipe for carrot cake I came across was this 1942 one for Carrot Cake Salad.

Carrot Cake Salad

Three large potatoes, 3 carrots, 1 tablespoon flour, 1 egg, ½ teaspoon sugar, 1 teaspoon salt, a

dash of pepper, salad dressing, and lettuce.

Scrape carrots and peel potatoes, grate and mix together. Beat egg with sugar, with sugar, salt and pepper. Mix in flour and grated vegetables. Turn into a well-greased dish and bake in a moderate oven until a golden brown and crisp on top. When cold, cut into slices and serve on lettuce leaves with a thick salad dressing.

Mrs. J. F. Ruhle[[15]](#footnote-15)

# Last words

Just one other recipe with which to conclude this article. Several consumers I’ve corresponded with in the course of writing this article said that when they make carrot cake it is Gretta Anna’s recipe they use – praising it’s never-fail-ness, it’s moistness and it’s ‘70s ambience. The moistness is helped by her use of canned pineapple.[[16]](#footnote-16) This being an article about the Australian carrot cake, I feel it incumbent on me to include a recipe that uses pineapple, that ubiquitous ingredient in Australian cuisine.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Anna’s Carrot Cake

Grate young fresh carrots to give one full cup and strain the juice from half a 15 ounce (400 g) can of crushed pineapple. In a bowl mix 1 cup of plain flour, 1 teaspoon baking powder, ¾ teaspoon baking soda, ½ teaspoon each of salt and cinnamon and ¼ cup sugar. Add 2 eggs and 5 tablespoons oil. Mix very well. Stir in the grated carrot, crushed pineapple and ¼ cup chopped walnuts. Bake in a moderate oven 350F (175C) for 35 minutes and cool before covering with topping.

To make Cream Cheese Topping, place in a bowl 3 tablespoons butter, 3 tablespoons cream cheese, ½ teaspoon vanilla, ½lb (250g) icing sugar and beat very well. If too thick add a small amount of milk to give a smooth consistency.[[18]](#footnote-18)

As for the icing in the middle of the carrot cake my dog-walker friend ate, Bourke Street Bakery cuts its carrot cake horizontally across the middle, covers the bottom half with cream cheese frosting then replaces the upper half of the cake. It was probably a slice of this carrot cake he ate.[[19]](#footnote-19)

**Appendix 1 Recipes surveyed for this article**

They are listed by year and where there are more than one in a year alphabetically by the name of the publication.

‘Carrot Pudding’, *Weekly Times* 17 December 1870 p.14 accessed at [17 Dec 1870 - THE LADIES' COLUMN. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/219366713?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20pudding%2C%20recipe)

‘Almond Cheese-Cakes’, *The Australasian* 3 March 1866 p.3 accessed at [03 Mar 1866 - RECIPES. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/138045406?searchTerm=almond%2C%20cheese%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Carrot Cheese-Cake’, *Geelong Advertiser* 23 October 1909 p.8 accessed at [23 Oct 1909 - CARROT CHEESE-CAKE. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/150665040?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Carrot Cake’, *Jewish Herald* 14 April 1919 p.8 accessed at [14 Apr 1919 - Carrot Cake. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149670412?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Carrot Cheese Cakes’, *Chronicle* 10 April 1826 70 accessed at [10 Apr 1926 - CARROT DISHES. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/89642966?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Carrot Cake’, Examiner 30 May 1931 accessed at [30 May 1931 - An Economical Recipe - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/51701718?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Carrot Cake’, *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser* 5 March 1932 p.7 accessed at [05 Mar 1932 - CARROT CAKE. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149083809?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Carrot Cake’, *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser* 13 February 1932 p.4 accessed at [13 Feb 1932 - CARROT CAKE. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149088265?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Carrot Cake’, *Sunday Times* 7 October 1934 p.2 accessed at [07 Oct 1934 - CARROT CAKE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58731432?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Swiss Cake’, *The Courier Mail* 18 October 1934 p.12 accessed at [18 Oct 1934 - Swiss Cake. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/35635805?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Carrot Cake’, *The Land* 29 August 1941 p.14 accessed at [29 Aug 1941 - CARROT CAKE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/104238564?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Carrot Cake Salad’, *Worker* 28 September 1942 p. 13 [28 Sep 1942 - Best Recipe For Week Ended Sept. 7, 1942. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/71446411?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Try Carrot in Fruit Cake’, *The Courier Mail* 14 August 1944 p.4 accessed at [14 Aug 1944 - COOKERY EXCHANGE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/48974170?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Two in One Carrot Dish’, *The Courier Mail* 4 August 1945 p.4 accessed at [04 Aug 1945 - Prize Recipe - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/50253319?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Carrt Cakes’, *Brisbane Telegraph,* 28 July 1949 p.30 accessed at [28 Jul 1949 - Chef recommends CARROT CAKES - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212206162?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Spicy Carrot Cake’, The Family Cookbook, Paul Hamlyn 1971 p. 51

‘Passover Carrot Cake’, Jewish Times 13 March 1975 p.19 accessed at [13 Mar 1975 - JEWISH TIMES PASSOVER RECIPE WINNERS - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/263228525?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

Teplitzky, Grett Anna, *The Gretta Anna Recipes*, Quando 1978, Cakes Gateaux and Tarts, Recipe 26

‘Carrot Cakes’, *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 15 August 1979 p.89 accessed at [15 Aug 1979 - CARROT CAKES ARE BIG NEWS! - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/55479267?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe).

‘Carrot Cake’, *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 4 March 1981 p.69 accessed at [04 Mar 1981 - Prize recipe - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/55458757?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Carrot and Banana’, *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 1 July 1981 p.76 accessed at [01 Jul 1981 - Prize recipe - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/46449431?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Carrot Cake’, *The Australian Jewish News* 19 February 1982 p.29 accessed at [19 Feb 1982 - What cooks CARROT CAKE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/262756881?searchTerm=carrot%20cake)

‘Sour Cream Carrot Cake’, *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 17 February 1982 p.77 accessed at [17 Feb 1982 - Prize recipe - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/55187793?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Muesli Carrot Cake’, *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 13 October 1982 p.116 accessed at [13 Oct 1982 - Prize recipe - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/44525311?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Carrot Cake’ *Australian and New Zealand Vegetarian Cooking for Better Health*, 1983 p.102

‘Carrot Cake’, Fulton, *Margaret, Encyclopedia of Food and Cookery,* Octopus Books, 1983 p.58

‘Carrot Cake’, *The Canberra Times* 22 August 1986 p.12 accessed at [22 Aug 1986 - PLOTTO POT - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/119470262?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Carrot Cake’, *Tullamore and District Schools Centenary Cookbook*, 1990 p.207

‘Carrot and Walnut Cake’, *The Canberra Times* 24 May 1995 p.34 accessed at [24 May 1995 - Cakes are simple but very quick - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/130552850?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Simple Carrot Cake’, Alexander, Stephanie, The Cook’s Companion, Viking, 1996 p. 162

‘Two in One Carrot Cake’, *Port Lincoln Times* 25 April 1996 p.2 accessed at [25 Apr 1996 - Popular bowlers recipe - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/267156398?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe)

‘Carrot Cake’, Allam, Paul, and McGuiness, David, *Bourke Street Bakery*, Murdoch Books, 2009 p.301

1. *Trove* is the digital repository managed by the National Library of Australia [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The year of publication of what is arguably the first cookery book published in Australia: Irving, Mrs. *THE Housewife’s Guide; or an Economical and Domestic ART OF COOKERY, containing Directions for Marketing, Instructions for Dressing Butchers’ Meat, Poultry, Game, Fish, Vegetables, &c; likewise for Preparing Soups, Broths, Gravies, and Sauces; also the Art of Potting, Collaring, Pickling, Preserving, and Making Wines: to which is added the different Branches of Modern Pastry and Confectionery, &c. &c. &c.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Geelong Advertiser* 23 October 1909 p.8 accessed at [23 Oct 1909 - CARROT CHEESE-CAKE. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/150665040?searchTerm=carrot%20cake) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Weekly Times* 17 December 1870 p.14 accessed at [17 Dec 1870 - THE LADIES' COLUMN. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/219366713?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20pudding%2C%20recipe) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The Australasian* 3 March 1866 p.3 accessed at [03 Mar 1866 - RECIPES. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/138045406?searchTerm=almond%2C%20cheese%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Sunday Times* 7 October 1934 p.2 accessed at [07 Oct 1934 - CARROT CAKE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58731432?searchTerm=carrot%20cake); *The Courier Mail* 18 October 1934 p.12 accessed at [18 Oct 1934 - Swiss Cake. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/35635805?searchTerm=carrot%20cake); *The Courier Mail* 14 August 1944 p.4 accessed at [14 Aug 1944 - COOKERY EXCHANGE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/48974170?searchTerm=carrot%20cake); *Brisbane Telegraph,* 28 July 1949 p.30 accessed at [28 Jul 1949 - Chef recommends CARROT CAKES - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212206162?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe); *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 15 August 1979 p.89 accessed at [15 Aug 1979 - CARROT CAKES ARE BIG NEWS! - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/55479267?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Sunday Times* 7 October 1934 p.2 accessed at [07 Oct 1934 - CARROT CAKE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58731432?searchTerm=carrot%20cake); *The Land* 29 August 1941 p.14 accessed at [29 Aug 1941 - CARROT CAKE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/104238564?searchTerm=carrot%20cake); *The Courier Mail* 14 August 1944 p.4 accessed at [14 Aug 1944 - COOKERY EXCHANGE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/48974170?searchTerm=carrot%20cake) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Examiner* 30 May 1931 p.12 accessed at [30 May 1931 - An Economical Recipe - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/51701718?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Daily Mercury* 31 May 1951 p.9 accessed at [31 May 1951 - TODAY'S RECIPE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/172240495?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20pudding%2C%20recipe) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Jewish Herald 14 April 1919 p.8 accessed at [14 Apr 1919 - Carrot Cake. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149670412?searchTerm=carrot%20cake) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Sunday Tines* 7 October 1934 p.2 accessed at [07 Oct 1934 - CARROT CAKE - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58731432?searchTerm=carrot%20cake) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. [Weet-Bix - Ten Random Facts](https://tenrandomfacts.com/weet-bix/#:~:text=The%20forerunner%20of%20Weet-bix%20were%20known%20as%20%E2%80%98Granose,where%20they%20were%20being%20fed%20to%20the%20troops.) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The *Australian Women’s Weekly* 13 October 1982 p.116 accessed at [13 Oct 1982 - Prize recipe - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/44525311?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ‘Spicy Carrot Cake’, *The Family Cookbook*, Paul Hamlyn 1971 p. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Worker* 28 September 1942 p.13 accessed at [28 Sep 1942 - Best Recipe For Week Ended Sept. 7, 1942. - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/71446411?searchTerm=carrot%20cake) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Margaret Fulton, doyenne of Australian cookery book authors also used crushed pineapple in her 1983 recipe . Fulton, *Margaret, Encyclopedia Food and Cookery,* Octopus Books, 1983 p.58 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Canned crushed pineapple is also used in Margaret Fulton’s Carrot Cake recipe - Fulton, *Margaret, Encyclopedia of Food and Cookery,* Octopus Books, 1983 p.58, and in Pineapple Carrot Cake *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 15 August 179 p.89 accessed at [15 Aug 1979 - CARROT CAKES ARE BIG NEWS! - Trove (nla.gov.au)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/55479267?searchTerm=carrot%2C%20cake%2C%20recipe). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Teplitzky, Grett Anna, *The Gretta Anna Recipes*, Quando 1978, Cakes Gateaux and Tarts, Recipe 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Allam, Paul, and McGuiness, David, *Bourke Street Bakery*, Murdoch Books, 2009 p.301 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)