Mom’s All-Star Cheesecake

My mom makes the best damn cheesecake in the world. If you don’t believe that, you are either a cretin or have never tasted her cheesecake. It’s different from most cheesecakes, in that it is much moister than what you’re used to. We had it only twice a year: at Christmas and on my father’s birthday, in late August. Worth waiting months for, and expensive to boot.

Crust mixture:
1 C sifted all-purpose flour
1/4 C granulated sugar
1 t grated lemon zest
1/4 t vanilla extract
1/2 C butter at room temperature
1 jumbo egg yolk

Mix flour, sugar, lemon zest and vanilla. With a pastry cutter or a pair of knives, scissor-fashion, cut in the butter and egg yolk. Shape dough into a ball, wrap in waxed paper, and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Begin preheating oven to 400˚ F. Roll 1/3 of the dough between floured pieces of waxed paper into a 9.5” circle. Place on the bottom of a 9” springform pan and trim to fit. Bake at 400˚ F about 10 minutes or until golden; remove from oven and cool. Grease the sides of the springform pan and fit over the base with the cooled dough still in place. Roll the rest of the dough into a 15” x 4” rectangle, cut in half lengthwise, and use the dough to line the sides of the pan, patching as necessary.

NB: the dough may be very difficult, even impossible, to roll out—if so, simply press the dough into the pan with your fingers. If you do this, keep the thickness consistent. You may pre-bake the side dough, too, but it isn’t necessary.

Cheese filling:
5 8-ounce packages cream cheese, at room temperature
1 3/4 C granulated sugar
1/4 t vanilla extract
1/2 t grated orange zest
5 large, extra-large, or jumbo eggs
2 large, extra-large or jumbo egg yolks
1/4 C heavy cream
3 T flour
1/4 t salt
1/2 t grated lemon zest

Increase the oven temperature to 500˚ F. With an electric mixer or a spoon, beat the cheese until fluffy. Combine the sugar with the vanilla, orange zest, flour, salt and lemon zest. Slowly add this mixture to the cheese, beating until smooth. Add the eggs and then the egg yolks, one at a time, beating after each addition. Stir in the cream. Turn the mixture into the springform pan lined with the cookie-dough crust, above.

The secret to this cheesecake is the size of the eggs. Using large, extra-large or jumbo eggs guarantees the moist center that sets this cheesecake apart from all others. Don’t use medium eggs unless you want a mediocre—i.e. dry—cheesecake.
Bake at 500˚ F for 12 minutes or until the edges of the dough turn golden. Reduce the oven temperature to 200˚ F, then bake for 1 hour or until the top is a dark golden-brown—a toothpick should come out mostly clean. Cool on a rack away from drafts. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour; remove side of pan, separating crust carefully, then put the cake back in the refrigerator until cold. This will be best if refrigerated for 24 hours.

DO NOT adulterate with any additions of chocolate, liqueur, fruit toppings or anything else. You cannot improve on perfection.

—transcribed, liberally, from Catharine Sisk’s recipe (by David Sisk)