

Prep time: 25 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes (for crust)

Chill time: 4 hours minimum (overnight recommended)

Total time: 4 hours 35 minutes

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Ingredients

For the Crust:

- 1 ½ cups (150g) graham cracker crumbs (about 12 full sheets)
- ¼ cup (50g) granulated sugar

- 7 tablespoons (100g) unsalted butter, melted

For the Cheesecake Layer:

- 1 package (8 oz / 226g) cream cheese, softened to room temperature
- 1 cup (120g) powdered sugar, sifted
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 ½ cups (360ml) heavy whipping cream, cold

For the Lemon Pudding Layer:

- 2 packages (3.4 oz / 96g each) instant lemon pudding mix
- 3 cups (720ml) cold whole milk
- Zest of 1 large lemon (optional, for extra zing)

For the Topping:

- 1 ½ cups (360ml) heavy whipping cream, cold

- ¼ cup (30g) powdered sugar
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - Optional garnishes: Lemon zest curls, crushed graham crackers, or fresh mint leaves
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Instructions

Part 1: The Crust (The Foundation)

1. **Preheat & Prepare:** Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C). Lightly grease a 9×13-inch baking dish.
2. **Make the Crumbs:** If using whole graham crackers, pulse them in a food processor until you have fine, even crumbs. Alternatively, place them in a sealed zip-top bag and crush them with a rolling pin.
3. **Combine:** In a medium bowl, combine the graham cracker crumbs, granulated sugar, and melted butter. Mix with a fork until the mixture resembles wet sand and all crumbs are moistened.
4. **Press:** Pour the crumb mixture into the prepared baking dish. Using the flat bottom of a measuring cup or your fingers, press the crumbs firmly and evenly into the bottom of the dish to create a compact, solid layer.

5. **Bake & Cool:** Bake for 8-10 minutes, until the crust is fragrant and just set. Remove from the oven and set aside on a wire rack to cool completely. Do not skip this step; a cooled crust is essential to prevent the layers from melting.

Part 2: The Cheesecake Layer (The Velvet)

1. **Beat the Cream Cheese:** In a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer or in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the softened cream cheese on medium speed until it is completely smooth and lump-free. This should take about 2-3 minutes. Scrape down the sides of the bowl.
2. **Add Sweetness:** Add the powdered sugar and vanilla extract. Beat on medium speed until fully incorporated and smooth, another 1-2 minutes. Scrape down the bowl again.
3. **Whip the Cream:** In a separate, clean bowl, pour the cold heavy whipping cream. Using the whisk attachment (or a hand mixer with clean beaters), whip on medium-high speed until stiff peaks form. This means the cream holds its shape and doesn't droop when you lift the beaters.
4. **Fold Together:** Gently fold the whipped cream into the cream cheese mixture in three additions. Use a spatula and a light hand, folding until just combined. Be careful not to deflate the whipped cream; you want it airy and light.
5. **Assemble:** Spread this luscious cheesecake layer evenly over the completely cooled crust. Place the dish in the refrigerator while you prepare the next layer.

Part 3: The Lemon Pudding Layer (The Sunshine)

1. **Whisk the Pudding:** In a large bowl, combine the two packages of instant lemon pudding mix and the cold milk. Whisk vigorously for about 2 minutes, until the mixture begins to thicken. If using, whisk in the lemon zest.
2. **Let it Set Slightly:** Allow the pudding to sit for 5 minutes to thicken further. This makes it easier to spread without mixing into the cheesecake layer.
3. **Layer It:** Carefully pour the lemon pudding over the chilled cheesecake layer. Use a spatula to spread it into an even layer, covering the entire surface.
4. **Chill:** Return the dish to the refrigerator and let it chill for at least 15-20 minutes while you make the topping.

Part 4: The Whipped Topping (The Cloud)

1. **Whip the Cream:** In a clean, cold bowl, combine the cold heavy whipping cream, powdered sugar, and vanilla extract.
2. **Beat to Stiff Peaks:** Beat on medium-high speed until stiff peaks form. The topping should be thick, fluffy, and hold its shape beautifully.
3. **Crown the Dessert:** Spread the whipped topping evenly over the chilled lemon pudding layer. Use a spatula to create decorative swirls or peaks if desired.

Part 5: The Final Chill & Serve

1. **The Patience Payoff:** Cover the dish tightly with plastic wrap or foil. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours, but overnight is highly recommended. This allows all the layers to set firmly and the flavors to meld together into pure perfection.
 2. **Garnish & Serve:** Just before serving, garnish with fresh lemon zest curls, a sprinkle of crushed graham crackers, or a few small mint leaves.
 3. **Slice and Savor:** Use a sharp knife to cut into squares. For the cleanest slices, wipe the knife with a damp cloth between cuts. Serve cold and enjoy the symphony of creamy, tangy, and sweet flavors.
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Recipe Notes & Tips

- **Cream Cheese Temperature:** It is crucial that your cream cheese is truly at room temperature. If it's too cold, it will be lumpy and won't incorporate smoothly. Let it sit out for at least 1-2 hours.
- **Cold is Key:** The heavy whipping cream must be very cold to whip properly. Keep it in the fridge until the moment you need it. For best results, chill your mixing bowl and beaters in the freezer for 10 minutes before whipping.
- **Instant Pudding is a Must:** Do not use cook-and-serve pudding mix for this recipe. It will not set correctly and will create a soupy layer.

- **Make-Ahead Marvel:** This dessert is a dream for entertaining because it must be made ahead. You can prepare it up to 24 hours in advance. Add the final whipped topping and garnishes a few hours before serving.
- **Flavor Variations:** For a different twist, try using instant vanilla pudding and adding 2 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice. You could also use a chocolate graham cracker crust for a “chocolate lemon” vibe.

Nutrition Information (Estimated)

Serving Size: 1/12th of the recipe

Calories: 480

Total Fat: 34g

Saturated Fat: 21g

Cholesterol: 105mg

Sodium: 310mg

Total Carbohydrates: 38g

Dietary Fiber: 0g

Total Sugars: 30g

Protein: 5g