



Strawberry Pretzel Icebox Salad



This retro favorite is one of the easiest, prettiest, and most refreshing fresh strawberry desserts around. It's been around since the 1970s, so while I didn't invent this recipe, I did spruce it up a bit. Instead of a small box of frozen berries, I use a heaping quart of sliced fresh strawberries and only enough Jell-O to hold them in place and make them shine. I use real whipped cream and cream cheese instead of Cool Whip in the filling, which makes it taste like no-bake cheesecake. I didn't dare mess with the crushed salted pretzel crust that balances the sweetness, and it's perfect as is. That crust lets us say "You'll never guess what's in it!" (in a good way), which remains a great teaser when introducing this salad (um, dessert) to those who are new to this delightful recipe. Yes, this is one of those recipes we call a "salad" when it's sweet enough to be dessert.

My big tip for success in making a picture-perfect salad with distinct layers that will cut cleanly is to give each layer the time it needs. Preparing each layer is quick and easy, and the cooling and chilling are hands off. Let the crust cool before adding the filling. Chill the filling before adding the topping. Let the Jell-O partially set before folding in the berries, and then let the topping chill until firm before serving.

Makes 12 servings

INGREDIENTS

Crust

2 cups finely crushed salted pretzels
(7 ounces)
3 tablespoons sugar
6 tablespoons salted butter, melted

Topping

2 (3-ounce) boxes strawberry Jell-O
(not sugar free)
2 cups boiling water
4 cups sliced fresh strawberries

Filling

8 ounces cream cheese,
at room temperature
1 cup sugar
2 cups whipping cream, chilled
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

THE KEY
Ingredient
with Sheri Castle



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DIRECTIONS

For the Crust:

- 1 Preheat the oven to 400°F. Toss together the crushed pretzels, sugar, and butter in a medium bowl and then press evenly across the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Bake until lightly toasted and fragrant, 8 to 10 minutes. Place on a wire rack to cool completely.

For the Filling:

- 2 Beat the cream cheese until smooth in a large bowl with a mixer set to high speed. Add the cream and vanilla and beat to stiff peaks. Spread evenly over the cooled crust, taking care to spread it all the way to the edges so that the topping will not seep down the sides of the pan and turn the crust soggy. Cover and refrigerate until chilled, at least 1 hour.

For the Topping:

- 3 Stir together the Jell-O and boiling water in a medium bowl. Refrigerate uncovered only until it reaches the consistency of uncooked egg whites, about 30 minutes. Stir in the strawberries. Spread over the filling.
- 4 Refrigerate until firmly set, at least 4 hours. Serve chilled.