

Chocolate Chestnut Naked Cake

BY LAURIE BETH GILLS

The Cake

Serves: 12. Yield: Makes one two-layer, eight-inch cake (make this recipe twice if you want a four-layer cake)

Ingredients

- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup chestnut flour (a good substitute is almond or hazelnut flour)
- 1 Tbsp. baking powder
- 1 Good pinch of fine sea salt (I use Maldon)
- 1/3 cup + 2 Tbsps. good quality dark cocoa powder
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- ¾ cup light brown sugar
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, at room temperature (plus more for the pans)
- ¾ cup buttermilk, well-shaken
- 4 large eggs, room temperature
- 1½ tsps. vanilla extract
- 2 Tbsps. vegetable oil
- ¼ cup freshly brewed black coffee, room temperature (I use Gevalia)

Method:

1. Position a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. Butter and flour two 8" cake pans, tapping out the excess.
3. In a large bowl sift all dry ingredients (listed above), then transfer into the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Mix on low to combine.
4. In a separate bowl gently whisk together eggs, vanilla, ¼ cup buttermilk, and oil. Set aside.
5. With the mixer on low speed, slowly add the 2 sticks of butter and ½ cup of buttermilk, just until dry mix is moistened. Increase speed to medium-low for about 1 ½ minutes, then scrape down the sides and bottom.
6. Slowly add the egg mixture, beating just long enough to blend. Scrape down the sides of the bowl again to ensure an even mix. Add the coffee and beat the batter on medium-high for a final minute to ensure everything is well-mixed.
7. Divide the batter evenly into the two prepared pans. Smooth tops with a small offset spatula, or use the back of a spoon. The pans should be about three-quarters full. Bake 20 to 25 minutes or until a cake tester inserted near the center comes out almost clean. Let the cakes cool in pans on racks for 10-12 minutes. Run a knife around the edge of the cake to help loosen, then invert onto racks. Wait about 3 minutes and then reinvert cakes, cooling completely top side up.
8. While the cakes cool, make the frosting.

Chestnut Maple Buttercream Frosting

Yield: about 1 ½ cups

(double this amount if baking all four layers)

Ingredients:

- 1 stick unsalted butter, softened and cut into small pieces
- 1 Tbsp. chestnut purée, softened (available at Amazon.com)
- 1 pinch fine sea salt
- 2 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
- ¾ Tbsp. Vermont maple syrup infused with real vanilla bean (can substitute using ½ tablespoon pure maple syrup plus ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract)
- 2 Tbsps. half and half
- ¼ cup roasted chestnuts shelled and ready to eat, finely chopped.

Method:

1. Using an electric mixer, cream the butter, chestnut purée, and salt until light and creamy on low-medium speed.
2. Reduce speed to low and add 1 cup sugar, mixing until blended. Add the remaining sugar, one cup at a time until all incorporated, beating well. Scrape down the sides and bottom of bowl.
3. Add the vanilla, maple syrup, and half and half; beat on high for a further 2-3 minutes until fluffy and smooth. If frosting is too thick, add more half and half.
4. Set aside until ready to use.

Assemble the cake:

1. If your cakes have domed a bit on top, use a serrated knife to trim the tops for nice, even, flat-top layers.
2. Position the first cake on top an 8" cake board, then onto a cake stand or plate. Spread a fairly thick layer of frosting on it using an offset spatula, then top with some of the chopped chestnuts. Repeat this process for the second layer, (and third if creating a four-layer cake), then carefully place the last layer upside-down so that the top stays flat and virtually crumb-free.
3. Add a thin layer of buttercream to the sides of the cake, and then start spreading it out as you rotate the cake, creating the "naked" effect. Remove any excess frosting. Place in the fridge for a few minutes if needed.
4. Using a small sifter, apply a simple dusting on top of the cake with confectioners' sugar. Serve as is, or choose your own favorite topping. (I like using fresh rosemary fresh from the garden. It easily creates a rustic, yet sophisticated look.)
5. I recommend using a sharp, thin-blade knife when serving.
6. You can cover cake in the fridge for up to three days. Just remember to take it out an hour or so before serving.