

DARK CHOCOLATE CAKE WITH PEPPERMINT BUTTERCREAM

NOTE: contains GLUTEN. To make these gluten-free, click on the GLUTEN FREE CHOCOLATE CUPCAKES WITH ESPRESSO BUTTERCREAM photo for cake recipe, and use the peppermint buttercream recipe below.

This is my go-to chocolate cake recipe! A couple notes:

Yes, you have to use cake flour. I use [Swans Down](#). Do you really have to sift the cake flour? YES. Sorry. I hate sifting too. One way I've simplified it is to store my cake flour in a very large/wide glass bowl with a plastic airtight lid (make sure you label it). Before I use the flour, I scoop roughly the amount I need into a fine mesh strainer and shake it side-to-side to sift it right back into the storage bowl. Then I spoon that sifted flour into my measuring cup. Remember to spoon it loosely into your measuring cup and then level it off with the side of your spoon before putting it into your mixing bowl. Too much flour or unsifted flour will leave you with a cake that's either too dry, too heavy or both.

If you're making this egg-free, you'll need to strain a can of organic chickpeas to make aquafaba. I like [Wegmans](#) organic chickpeas (garbanzo beans) best because they don't have a strong flavor. Open the can, strain the juice through a small fine-mesh strainer (like a tea strainer) into a measuring cup. Set aside the chickpeas for another use. Rinse the strainer, then strain the liquid AGAIN into a jar with a lid. This will keep in your fridge for about three days. Make your egg substitute for this cake first (see below) and set it aside while you make the rest of the cake batter.

If you ARE using eggs, here's a tip: when you're using such expensive ingredients, it sure is upsetting to accidentally drop an egg, shell and all, into the mixing bowl and watch it get chopped up into the batter (I've learned this lesson the hard way . . . more than once). Crack all your eggs into a large pourable measuring cup first, then you can pour them into the batter in a controlled way.

OKAY, LET'S DO THIS!

CAKE INGREDIENTS:

3 ½ cups sifted cake flour
2 ¼ cups sugar
1 tsp baking soda
½ tsp baking powder
1 ½ tsp salt (**OMIT** if using aquafaba in egg substitute)
¾ cup Hershey's SPECIAL DARK cocoa powder
2 cups canola oil
1 cup buttermilk (or non-dairy milk with 1 tsp apple cider vinegar stirred in)
¾ cup water
3 eggs + 1 yolk*
1 ½ tsp apple cider vinegar
1 tsp vanilla extract

*Egg substitute ingredients (10 tablespoons)

3 Tbsp pumpkin puree or applesauce
3 Tbsp aquafaba
4 Tbsp water
3 tsp powdered egg replacer such as **Namaste** or **Ener-G** brand
1 tsp apple cider vinegar

WHISK TOGETHER in a bowl or large measuring cup until frothy, set aside

PEPPERMINT BUTTERCREAM FROSTING

3 sticks unsalted butter or non-dairy margarine (my favorite: **Earth Balance** soy-free buttery sticks)

1/2 cup **Spectrum** organic all vegetable shortening
4 ½ cups confectioners sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt (omit this if you're using Earth Balance sticks)
2 - 3 tsp peppermint extract, to taste

Candy canes, crushed (I put them in a Ziplock bag and smack them with the back of the spoon ~ kids love doing this)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray two 9" round cake pans (or two 12-cavity muffin pans) with non-stick spray, line the bottoms with parchment paper (or cupcake liners, if applicable), and spray the pans (lined muffin pans) again. That second spray is important,

don't skip it. Set aside. Here's a tip you'll love me for: you can buy precut 9" parchment rounds on [Amazon!](#)

In a stand mixer, combine all dry ingredients. With mixer on low, stir in canola oil, milk, water and apple cider vinegar. Increase mixer to medium high and beat for one minute, stopping to scrape down sides halfway through. Turn mixer to low and add in eggs one at a time (or egg substitute) until just combined. Add in vanilla extract and beat on high for 30 seconds. Pour into prepared pans. Bake for 23 to 30 minutes until a toothpick inserted into the middle comes out clean. Cupcakes generally take 17 to 20 minutes. Allow to cool in pans for 5 minutes. For cakes, run a knife around the perimeter to loosen the cakes, then turn them out onto a wire rack to cool completely. Cupcakes should be moved to a wire rack to cool as well.

FROSTING:

Beat butter/margarine together with shortening until smooth. Add in sugar (and salt, if applicable) a cup at a time, beating at low speed and gradually increasing to high speed until smooth. Add peppermint extract and beat until blended. Take a little taste of your frosting and decide if it needs a little more of anything, like salt or more peppermint. I have learned that frosting is a VERY personal choice . . . too sweet, not sweet enough, too minty, too salty. The beauty of frosting is you can always make adjustments with a little more sugar, a little more shortening, a little more extract, etc. Once you've got it just right, frost your cake or pipe onto cupcakes. Sprinkle top of cake/cupcakes with candy cane pieces.

FROSTING TIPS:

Chocolate cake means CRUMBS in your frosting. Level your cakes if necessary (use a serrated knife to carefully cut across the top and remove the dome). Use a generous spoonful of frosting between the layers. Then frost the top and sides with a thin layer of frosting ~ don't worry about crumbs. Put the cake in the freezer for at least half an hour. This is called a crumb layer. When you take it out, frost the top and sides again ~ it will be perfect! Want to go the extra mile? Pick up some piping tips at the grocery store or a cake supply store and pipe a festive edge around the perimeter. There are special larger tips for cupcakes that make it ridiculously easy to create a professional-looking cupcake.

BON APPETIT!