Chocolate Cupcakes with Creamy Chocolate Frosting

By Jennifer Segal, cake portion adapted from Magnolia Bakery; frosting adapted from Cook's Illustrated

Servings: 24 cupcakes

Cook Time: 20 Minutes

Total Time: 1 Hour

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE CUPCAKES

6 ounces unsweetened chocolate, broken into small pieces

2 cups all-purpose flour, spooned into measuring cup and leveled-off

2 teaspoons instant espresso powder (optional, to enhance chocolate flavor)

1 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened

1 cup granulated sugar

1 cup packed light brown sugar

4 large eggs, at room temperature

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 cup buttermilk

FOR THE FROSTING

8 ounces milk chocolate, broken into small pieces

2-1/2 sticks (20 tablespoons) unsalted butter, softened but still cool

1 cup Confectioners' sugar

3/4 cup natural unsweetened cocoa powder, such as Hershey's

Pinch salt

3/4 cup light corn syrup

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS

FOR THE CUPCAKES

Place the chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl and cook in the microwave in 20-second intervals, stirring in between, until about three-quarters of the way melted. Stir, allowing the residual heat in the bowl to melt the remaining chocolate completely. (If necessary, place the chocolate back in microwave for a few seconds.) Set aside to cool.

Preheat the oven to 350°F and set two oven racks in the centermost positions. Line two 12-cup muffin tins with paper liners and lightly spray the top of the pan with cooking spray (it's okay if a bit gets in the liners; this prevents the cupcake tops from sticking to the pan).

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, espresso powder (if using), baking soda and salt until well combined.

In the bowl of an electric mixer, cream the butter, granulated sugar, and brown sugar until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula. Add the eggs one at a time, scraping the bowl and beating well after each addition. (Don't worry if the batter looks curdled; it will smooth out once you add the chocolate in the next step.) Beat in the vanilla and lukewarm chocolate.

Add the dry ingredients in three separate additions, alternating with the buttermilk, and scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl to be sure the batter is evenly mixed. The batter will be quite thick.

Spoon the batter into the prepared muffin cups until almost full. Bake for 22-24 minutes, or until the tops look dry and a toothpick inserted into the center of a cupcake comes out clean (note that one pan may finish cooking before the other). Cool the cupcakes in the pan for about 10 minutes, then transfer them to a rack to cool completely. When the cupcakes are completely cooled, use a butter knife or small offset spatula to swirl the frosting over top. The cupcakes are best served fresh on the day they are made. Store leftover cupcakes in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to two days (bring to room temperature before serving).

FOR THE FROSTING

Place the chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl and cook in the microwave in 20-second intervals, stirring in between, until about three-quarters of the way melted. Stir, allowing the residual heat in the bowl to melt the remaining chocolate completely. (If necessary, place the chocolate back in microwave for a few seconds.) Set aside to cool.

In a food processor, process the butter, sugar, cocoa powder and salt until smooth, about 30 seconds, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed. Add the corn syrup and vanilla and process until just combined, 5 to 10 seconds. Scrape down the sides of the bowl, then add the lukewarm chocolate and pulse until smooth and creamy, 10 to 15 seconds. Do not overmix. The frosting can be used immediately or held at room temperature for 2 to 3 hours.

Pro Tip: The frosting is pretty foolproof, but if it "breaks" for any reason, try adding a teaspoon or two of warm water and mixing again.