

THE Chocolate cake

Serves 10-12

Hands-on Time 40 minutes (plus cooling)

Baking Time 35 minutes

Ingredients

400g (plus extra for greasing) Unsalted butter (softened)
40g plus 2 tsp Cocoa powder
150ml plus 5 tbsp Full-fat milk
220g Dark chocolate (minimum 70%)
300g Caster sugar
5 eggs, large
240g Self raising flour
1/8 tsp plus a pinch Fine salt
150g Soured cream
1 tsp Vanilla extract
400g Icing sugar

Equipment

Scissors
Baking parchment
2 x 20cm Fixed or push bottom cake tins
Saucepan
Spatula
2 Large bowls
Electric whisk or hand whisk
Sieve
Wide bowl
Wire rack
Bread knife
Microwaveable bowl
Palette knife
Disposable piping bag and nozzle (optional)

Preheat the oven to 170°C/150°C (Fan)/325°F/Gas mark 3 and then get on with making the cake!

Cut a piece of baking parchment into two circles for the bases of the cake tins.

Grease the bottom of the tins without the parchment in them using the extra butter.

Line the tins with the parchment and grease the sides and bottom, this time greasing the parchment.

Add 1 tsp of cocoa powder to each tin.

Shake around until the bottom and sides of each tin are coated.

Tap the tins over a sink so any excess cocoa is discarded.

Add 200g of butter and 150ml of milk to the saucepan and place over a low heat. Stir with a spatula until the butter has melted.

Remove the pan from the heat, add 120g of chocolate and keep stirring until it has melted.

Leave to cool in the pan.

Add 200g of sugar and the egg yolks to a large mixing bowl and whisk for 1 minute until a thick pale yellow.

Add the egg whites to the other large bowl and clean the whisk.

Whisk until foamy before gradually adding the remaining 100g of caster sugar.

Continue whisking until all of the sugar has been added and the whites are firm.

Sieve the flour, 1/8 teaspoon of salt, and 40g of cocoa together over the wide bowl.

Add the soured cream and vanilla to the melted chocolate, and stir.

Add the chocolate mix to the thick egg mixture and gently stir until combined.

Add 1/3 of the flour mix to the batter and gently fold in.

Add the remaining 2/3s, folding between the addition of each 1/3.

Take 1/3 of the egg whites and add to the mix, stirring gently. This will loosen the mixture up.

Add another 1/3, this time folding into the cake mix.

Repeat this with the remaining third.

Divide the mixture between the two cake tins and pop into the oven on a middle shelf for 35 minutes.

When the cakes have baked, remove from the oven and leave to cool in the tins for 30 minutes.

Tip the cakes upside down onto the wire rack and remove the parchment from the bottoms.

Leave the cakes to cool completely.

Once the cakes have cooled, you can halve them before getting on with the icing. Using a bread knife slice into the cake. I find it is easier to cut a little into the cake, rotate the sponge a bit, cut into it some more, and so and so forth until you get to the middle. For me this results in an even slice.

For the icing melt the remaining 100g of chocolate in a microwaveable bowl.

Place the bowl in the microwave for 20 seconds at a time, stirring between breaks.

Add the remaining 200g of butter and all of the icing sugar to one of the large bowls you used earlier, ensuring it's clean before use.

Whisk until combined before adding the chocolate and a pinch of salt and whisking again.

Add 5 tablespoons of milk and give a final whisk. You should have a thick yet light buttercream which is suitable for piping. If you think it's too stiff, add 1 teaspoons of milk at a time.

When building the cake it's best to keep the two slices which were from the bottoms of the sponges for the top and bottom of your cake.

Place one of the bottoms, bottom-side down and add 1/4 of the butter cream on top before spreading it out.

Sandwich the second sponge on top of the butter cream. Top with more butter cream and repeat. With the last slice

place it bottom-side up so your cake has a flat top.

You now need to decide how to decorate the ice the cake!

Here are a couple of options:

- 1) Use the butter cream to fill any gaps around the middle. Then dab bit of icing around the sides. Using a palette knife or dough scraper, drag the icing around the side of the cake, so you're coating the outside and also are removing excess icing at the same time. You will need to press against the side of the cake as you do this. Repeat with the top of the cake, neatening the edges when you're finished so they're crisp and sharp. Spoon the rest of the icing into a piping bag and decorate the top!
- 2) Use the butter cream to fill any gaps around the middle. This time generously dab the icing around the sides of the cake. Dab more on top of the cake and spread over so it's neat and flat. It doesn't matter if any icing goes over the sides. Use the palette knife to spread the icing around the sides of the cake, however you don't want to press down too much. Keep the knife vertical so you're keeping the icing neat and straight. Do this until all of the side has been evenly coated. Check the edges and tidy if required.

Once iced, it's best to chill the cake for a bit to let the icing set.

Enjoy!