

Bûche de Noël

Makes 1 Cake

Chocolate Sponge Cake

- 3/4 cup + 2 Tbsp pastry flour (or cake and pastry flour)
- 1/2 tsp table salt
- 2 Tbsp cocoa powder, divided
- 6 large egg whites, room temperature
- 1/2 cup superfine or granulated sugar, divided
- 6 large egg yolks, room temperature
- 2 Tbsp icing (powdered) sugar—for dusting the baked sponge

Special Equipment

- 17 x 11.5-inch baking tray lined with parchment paper (base only)
- Additional baking tray (close in size to the tray above)
- Offset palate knife or plastic pastry scraper
- Fine mesh strainer (for sifting)
- Clean tea towel

Cooking Instructions

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Prepare your parchment-lined tray before you start making the cake. Your mixing bowl and whisk must be meticulously clean as any traces of fat could comprise the volume of the whipped egg whites. In a small bowl, sift together the pastry flour, salt, and cocoa powder, and mix to combine. Set aside.

In the bowl of a stand-up mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, or a medium bowl, whip the egg whites at medium-high speed for about a minute until frothy. Gradually add about half the sugar, increase the speed to high, and continue whisking for another minute or two or until the whites form a billowy, glossy meringue with firm peaks. Transfer to a clean bowl.

In the same bowl in which the whites were mixed, combine the eggs yolks and the balance of sugar and whip together at medium-high speed. Gradually increase the speed to high and continue whisking until the yolks have increased in volume and are thick, pale, and glossy, about 3-4 minutes.

Gently fold the meringue into the yolk mixture in 3-4 batches until no streaks remain. Carefully fold in the flour/cocoa powder mixture, in 3-4 batches, until the batter is uniform. (It will deflate somewhat with the addition of flour.)

Pour the batter onto the prepared baking tray and level with an off-set palette knife or the flat edge of a plastic scraper.

Using your index finger, create a little trench around the outer edges of the batter, where it meets the pan's edge. This helps keep the edges neat.

Bake in a preheated oven for 7-10 minutes, turning the baking tray once, until the sponge springs back when pressed with a finger. Check the cake after seven minutes as it can become dry if baked too long.

While still warm, loosen the edges of the cake with a knife. Sift half the icing sugar evenly over the sponge. Cover with a clean tea towel and place a baking tray on top.

Flip the sponge cake upside down and remove the top tray. Carefully remove the bottom tray so that the tea towel is directly on the counter and the cake lies flat. Peel the parchment from the cake and while still warm, dust it with the remaining icing sugar.

Using your tea towel, carefully roll the sponge cake, from the short end, around the tea towel. This helps the cake hold its shape for when the filling is eventually added. Set aside with the seam facing down. The sponge cake needs to cool completely before adding the buttercream.

Coffee Buttercream

This recipe involves cooked sugar, so please read the entire recipe before you start.

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup instant coffee crystals, such as Taster's Choice brand
- 6 egg yolks

- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4cup water
- 1 3/4 cup unsalted butter, softened to room temperature*

** The butter should be soft enough to spread easily. If not, whisk the butter until soft before you get started.*

Special Equipment

- Small fine mesh strainer
- Candy thermometer
- Pastry brush

Cooking Instructions

Before you start, place a cup of water and a pastry brush near the stove. As the sugar cooks, you'll need to brush down any bits of sugar that spatter to the edge of the pan. This prevents the sugar from crystallizing.

Pour the instant coffee crystals into a small bowl and drizzle in just enough boiling hot water, about 2 Tbsp, to make a thick syrup. Strain the mixture, and transfer to a small, lidded container.

In the bowl of a stand-up mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, or a medium bowl, whisk the yolks at medium-high speed. Gradually increase the speed to high and continue whisking until the yolks have increased in volume and are thick, pale, and glossy, about 3-4 minutes.

In a small saucepan, combine the sugar and water and clip a candy thermometer to the pan. Heat the sugar mixture over medium heat just until it reaches 235-240°F°, the “soft ball” stage*. Brush down any bits of sugar that sputter to the sides of the pan.

Without delay, pour the hot sugar mixture into the beaten egg yolks, in a thin steady stream, near the edge of the bowl, away from the whisk (so it does not send the hot sugar flying(whisking at high speed while you do so. (Don't worry if some of the sugar syrup sticks to the sides of your mixing bowl.) Continue whisking until your mixing bowl is no longer warm and the yolks are thick and glossy, about 2-3 minutes. (The mixture must cool down enough so that it doesn't melt the butter that follows.)

Add the softened butter in large spoonfuls and whisk until well incorporated. Add the coffee syrup, a teaspoon a time, until you're satisfied with the taste. (I use about 2-3 teaspoons, but coffee syrups differ in strength, so adjust to taste. Store leftover coffee syrup in the fridge.)

Note: The term “soft ball” stage refers to the sugar’s pliability: when a thread of heated sugar is dipped in cold water, it can be shaped, between index finger and thumb, into a tiny soft bead or ball).

Toffee Crunch Filling

Ingredients

- 4 Skor bars, 39 g each, or 156 g (5½ oz) of Skor Toffee Bits, if you can find them

Cooking Instructions

Crush the Skor bars with a rolling pin, but not too finely. You still want them to have a little texture and crunch. If using the Toffee Bits, no need to crush them.

Chocolate Ganache Topping

Ingredients

- ¾ cup (about 4 1/2 oz), good quality dark chocolate, ideally 60% cocoa, chopped into small pieces
- ¾ cup, about 6 oz, whipping cream (35%)

Cooking Instructions

Place the chopped chocolate into a small bowl. Heat the cream in a small saucepan until it just starts to simmer. Pour the hot cream over the chopped chocolate. Stir the mixture until smooth and well-combined. Set aside at room temperature.

Putting It All Together

Unfurl the sponge cake and spread the buttercream evenly on the cake to its edges, reserving about ½ cup. Sprinkle the crushed Skor bars evenly over the buttercream and re-roll the cake, placing it seam-side down.

Spread the reserved buttercream over the rolled cake, ensuring the ends are covered (no need to cover the base of the cake. Refrigerate, loosely covered, for about 40 minutes.

Once the buttercream is firm and the ganache has thickened to a spreadable consistency, spread a layer of ganache over the buttercream, including the ends. Reserve any leftover ganache for the mushroom meringue garnish, if using.

Carefully transfer the rolled cake to a serving tray (I use two metal spatulas, one at each end, to lift the cake).

Garnish with chocolate bark and meringue mushrooms, if desired. Note, the ganache must be at room temperature for the chocolate bark to stick to it. Recipes follow.

If you're not making the chocolate bark, simply drag the tines of a fork along the chocolate ganache, horizontally, to create a log-like pattern.

The cake can be wrapped in plastic, without the bark, and frozen but is best served at room temperature.

Meringue Mushroom Garnish

Ingredients

- 3 large egg whites, room temperature
- Pinch cream of tartar
- 3/4 cup superfine or granulated sugar
- Cocoa powder, optional

Special Equipment

- Pastry bag fitted with a 1/4-inch round piping tip
- Baking tray lined with parchment paper or a non-stick baking mat

Cooking Instructions

Preheat oven to 200°F.

In the meticulously clean bowl of a standup mixer, or a medium bowl, whisk the egg whites with a pinch of cream of tartar, at medium-high speed for about a minute until the whites are frothy. Gradually add the sugar, increase the speed to high, and continue whisking for another minute or two or until the whites form a billowy, glossy meringue with firm but soft peaks.

Spoon the meringue into a pastry bag fitted with a round piping tip.

Pipe the meringue into small mounds, anywhere from half an inch to 2 inches in diameter, on the prepared baking tray. For each mushroom cap, you'll need a slightly smaller mound for the stem.

To remove the peaks from the meringue mounds (created by the piping tip), dip your finger in water, and gently flatten them.

Bake for about an hour or until the meringues are dry and easily removed from the baking tray. Check the meringues after about 30 minutes; the smaller meringues will be ready before the larger ones. Some of the meringues will crack.

Arrange the meringues into groups of mushroom caps and (smaller) stems.

Using a sharp knife, slice a bit off the dome of each stem so it forms a flat surface.

Working with one meringue at a time, spread a thin layer of leftover chocolate ganache over the flat base of the cap.

Press the flat end of the stem to the base of the cap to form a mushroom. Continue with the remaining meringues.

If desired, dust with cocoa powder. Meringues will last for days in an airtight container stored in a cool dry place.

Chocolate Bark Garnish

Ingredients

- 3/4 cup (about 4½ oz), good quality dark chocolate, ideally 60% cocoa, chopped into small pieces

Special Equipment

- 2 sheets of parchment paper, about 16 x 15 inches

Cooking Instructions

Place the chocolate in a bowl fitted over a saucepan with about an inch of simmering water. (The bowl should not touch the water.) Stir the chocolate and once it starts to melt, turn off the heat and continue stirring until the mixture is completely melted.

Pour the mixture onto one sheet of parchment and smooth it evenly with an offset spatula, leaving a border of about an inch.

Cover with the remaining sheet of parchment and loosely roll up the chocolate. Refrigerate until firm, at least 30 minutes.

To use, unfurl the firmed chocolate and break-off the pieces. Decorate the Bûche de Noël by pressing the chocolate “bark” shards, horizontally, onto the room-temperature ganache.