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chocolate dessert cake recipe donna hay

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Chocolate Dessert Cake Recipe by Donna /Hay: A Decadent Delight for Every Occasion

When it comes to creating a memorable dessert that feels both indulgent and approachable, few authors can match the culinary vision of **Donna /Hay**Known for her elegant yet down to earth approach to baking, Donna has turned a simple chocolate cake into a show stopper that can be served at family gatherings, holiday feasts, or a quiet evening in. In this comprehensive guide we'll walk through every step of the *chocolate dessert cake recipe Donna /Hay* uncover the secrets behind its velvety texture, and offer variations that let you tailor the cake to your taste or dietary needs.

Why Donna /Hay's Chocolate Dessert Cake Stands Out

Donna Hay's recipes are celebrated for their clarity, balance, and the way they elevate everyday ingredients. Her chocolate dessert cake is no exception: it marries the richness of dark chocolate with the subtlety of espresso, the lightness of whipped cream, and the crunch of toasted nuts. The result is a cake that feels luxurious without being overpowering, and it pairs wonderfully with a glass of red wine or a cup of strong coffee.

What makes this recipe particularly special is its versatility. Whether you're a seasoned baker or a beginner, the instructions are straightforward. The cake layers are moist but not soggy, the frosting is silky and stable, and the garnish adds both visual appeal and a pleasant textural contrast. In addition, the recipe can be adapted for vegan or gluten free versions, making it a go to dessert for guests with dietary restrictions.

Ingredients: A Breakdown of the Essentials

Below is a detailed list of the ingredients you'll need. Keep in mind that the quality of chocolate and the freshness of eggs can significantly influence the final outcome.

For the Cake Layers

- 200 /g dark chocolate (70 /% cocoa solids), chopped
- 200 /g unsalted butter, softened
- 200 /g caster sugar
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature
- 100 /g plain flour, sifted
- 1 /tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp sea salt
- 1 /tbsp strong espresso (or instant espresso powder dissolved in 2 /tbsp hot water)
- 1 /tsp vanilla extract

For the Chocolate Ganache Frosting

- 200 /g dark chocolate, chopped
- 200 /ml heavy cream
- 1 /tbsp unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 /tsp vanilla extract

For the Crunchy Topping

- 50 /g hazelnuts or almonds, toasted and roughly chopped
- 1 /tbsp honey (optional, for a touch of sweetness)
- Pinch of sea salt

Optional Garnishes

- Fresh berries (raspberries, strawberries)
- Edible gold leaf (for a luxurious finish)
- Whipped cream or a dusting of cocoa powder

Step by Step Instructions

1. Preheat & Prepare

Preheat your oven to 180 °C (350 °F). Grease and line two 20 cm (8 in) round cake tins with parchment paper. This ensures the cake releases easily after baking.

2. Melt the Chocolate and Butter

In a heat proof bowl, combine the chopped dark chocolate and softened butter. Place the bowl over a pot of simmering water (double boiler method) and stir until fully melted and smooth. Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly.

3. Cream the Butter and Sugar

In a stand mixer or with a hand whisk, beat the softened butter and caster sugar together until pale and fluffy. This usually takes about 4–5 minutes on medium speed.

4. Add Eggs One at a Time

Beat in one egg at a time, ensuring each is fully incorporated before adding the next. This creates a stable base and helps prevent curdling.

5. Mix Dry Ingredients

Sift the flour, baking powder, and sea salt into a separate bowl. Gently fold this into the wet mixture using a spatula or a slow mixer on low speed. Be careful not to overmix; you want a smooth batter with occasional lumps.

6. Add Espresso & Vanilla

Stir in the espresso and vanilla extract. The espresso intensifies the chocolate flavor without making the cake taste like coffee. If you prefer a richer chocolate profile, you can add an extra tablespoon of cocoa powder at this stage.

7. Bake

Divide the batter evenly between the prepared tins. Tap the tins gently on the counter to release any large air pockets. Bake for 25–30 minutes, or until a skewer inserted into the center comes out with a few moist crumbs. Avoid overbaking to keep the cake moist.

8. Cool Completely

Allow the cakes to cool in the tins for 10 minutes, then turn them out onto a wire rack to cool completely. This step is crucial; if you start frosting while the cake is still warm, the ganache can melt.

9. Prepare the Ganache Frosting

Heat the heavy cream in a small saucepan until it just begins to simmer. Remove from heat and pour over the

chopped chocolate in a bowl. Let sit for 1 minute, then stir until smooth. Add the butter and vanilla, whisking until fully incorporated. If the ganache is too thick, add a splash of cream; if too runny, chill for a few minutes.

10. Frost the Cake

Place the first cake layer on a serving plate. Spread a generous layer of ganache over it. Add the second layer on top and cover the entire cake with the remaining ganache. Use a spatula or a bench scraper to smooth the sides and top.

11. Add the Crunchy Topping

In a small bowl, combine the toasted nuts, honey (if using), and a pinch of sea salt. Sprinkle the mixture evenly over the frosted cake. This adds a delightful crunch and a hint of caramelized flavor.

12. Chill & Serve

Refrigerate the cake for at least 30 minutes to set the ganache. When ready to serve, optionally top with fresh berries, a dusting of cocoa powder, or a dollop of whipped cream. If you're feeling fancy, add a touch of edible gold leaf for a glamorous finish.

Tips & Tricks for the Perfect Cake

- Use high quality chocolate – It's the star of the show. Choose a chocolate with 70 /% cocoa for depth and balance.
- Room temperature eggs – They blend more smoothly, creating a lighter batter.
- Don't overmix – Overmixing can develop gluten, making the cake dense.
- Test the cake early – Insert a toothpick; if it comes out clean or with just a few crumbs, you're done.
- Let the ganache cool slightly – This prevents it from melting the cake when applied.
- Use a bench scraper – It's easier to smooth the frosting without a spatula.

Variations & Pairings

1. Vegan Version

Replace butter with coconut oil or vegan butter, use plant based milk for the ganache, and substitute eggs with flaxseed meal (1 tbsp flaxseed + 3 tbsp water per egg). The texture remains similar, and the chocolate flavor is preserved.

2. Gluten Free Adaptation

Swap the plain flour for a gluten free all purpose blend. Ensure the baking powder is gluten free as well. The cake will bake slightly faster, so keep an eye on it.

3. Add a Surprise Center

Fill the middle of the cake with a swirl of raspberry jam or a chocolate mousse before frosting. This creates a burst of flavor when cutting the first slice.

4. Complementary Beverages

- Red wine – A full bodied Merlot or Cabernet pairs beautifully with chocolate.
- Coffee – A robust espresso or a cold brew enhances the chocolate notes.
- Milkshakes – A vanilla or chocolate milkshake is a fun, kid friendly accompaniment.

Serving Suggestions

- Slice into rounds – Serve 1 inch thick slices for a classic presentation.
- Use a cake ring – For a polished look, bake each layer in a cake ring.
- Add a drizzle – A thin chocolate or caramel drizzle adds visual flair.
- Garnish with berries – Fresh raspberries or strawberries provide a bright, tart contrast to the chocolate.

Storage & Shelf Life

The ganache frosted cake can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. Keep it wrapped tightly in plastic wrap to prevent it from absorbing fridge odors. If you plan to keep it longer, freeze the cake (without frosting) for up to 2 /months. Thaw overnight in the fridge, then reapply a fresh layer of ganache.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can I use milk chocolate instead of dark chocolate?

A: Yes, but the cake will be sweeter and less intense. Consider adding a pinch of sea salt to balance the sweetness.

Q: What if the ganache is too thick?

A: Warm it slightly or add a teaspoon of warm milk to thin it out. Stir until it reaches a spreadable consistency.

Q: How do I prevent the cake from drying out?

A: Keep the oven temperature accurate. Overbaking is the main culprit. Use a toothpick test to ensure the cake is done.

Q: Can I bake the cake in a different size tin?

A: Absolutely. If you use a larger tin, reduce the baking time by a few minutes. If you use a smaller tin, increase the time slightly.

Conclusion

Donna Hay’s chocolate dessert cake recipe is a testament to how simple ingredients, when combined thoughtfully, can produce a dessert that feels both luxurious and accessible. By following these steps, you’ll create a moist, richly flavored cake topped with silky ganache and a satisfying crunch of toasted nuts. Whether you’re celebrating a milestone or simply treating yourself, this cake will delight the senses and leave a lasting impression. So gather your ingredients, preheat the oven, and let the aroma of melted chocolate fill your kitchen – the result will be a dessert that truly deserves a standing ovation.

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