

Chocolate Simnel Cake

Serves: 10-12

Preparation and Making time: 45 - 60 minutes + extra time for cooling

Cooking time: 50 - 60 minutes

Ingredients

Cake

100g (3½oz) dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids)
250g (9oz) butter at room temperature and extra for greasing
250g (9oz) light brown sugar
4 large eggs
200g (7oz) plain flour and extra for dusting
A scant 2 teaspoons baking powder
55g (2oz) cocoa powder
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 teaspoon instant coffee dissolved in 1 tablespoon water- cooled

Chocolate frosting

150g (5½oz) dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids)
150ml (5floz) double cream
150g (5½oz) icing sugar

Chocolate marzipan

250g (9oz) icing sugar and extra for rolling
75g (3oz) cocoa powder
400g (14oz) ground almonds
1 teaspoon natural almond extract
2 medium egg whites - beaten until slightly frothy

For the decoration

Approximately 12 candy-coated chocolate mini eggs
1x 1 metre (40inch) length of ribbon

Method

Pre heat the oven 180°C/ 350°F/ Gas Mark4

For fan assisted electric ovens reduce the temperature by 10-20°C

1. To make the cake, place a heatproof bowl over a pan of hot but not boiling water. Break the chocolate into the bowl in small pieces and leave to melt.
2. Beat together the softened butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs one at a time adding 2 tablespoons of the flour after the first 2 eggs to prevent the mixture from separating.
3. Sift the flour, baking powder, cocoa and cinnamon into the mixture and combine. Add the vanilla extract with the liquid coffee followed by the melted chocolate and mix everything together until smooth.
4. Grease the inside of the casserole with some butter and dust with a little flour.
5. Spoon the cake mixture into the casserole, smooth over the top and bake in the centre of the oven without the lid for 50 - 60 minutes until the surface of the cake has a cracked appearance and a cocktail stick comes clean away. Allow the cake to completely cool before turning out of the casserole.

6. To make the frosting, melt the chocolate and cream together in a saucepan over a very low heat. Once the chocolate has melted whisk together, sift in the icing sugar and whisk again until smooth and glossy. Allow the icing to cool and place it into the refrigerator until it has become thick and spreadable.
7. Meanwhile, to make the chocolate marzipan, sift the icing sugar and cocoa into a bowl and stir in the ground almonds. Add the almond extract with just enough of the beaten egg white to bind the ingredients together but take care as it can become over-wet and sticky very quickly. Turn out onto a surface lightly dusted with icing sugar and knead until smooth.
8. Cut the marzipan into 3 even-sized pieces, divide one piece into 11 equal sized pieces and roll each one into small balls. Roll out each remaining piece of marzipan between a sheet of non-stick baking paper and a sheet of cling film; one into an 18cm (7inch) disc, and the other into a 19cm (7½inch) disc. Place to one side.
9. Slice the cooled cake into 2 halves. Spread the cut base with 1/3 of the frosting, top with the smaller disc of chocolate marzipan, spread over another 1/3 of the frosting and replace the cake top.
10. Reserve 1 teaspoon of the frosting to fix the topping decoration. Spread the remaining frosting on top of the cake and place on the second disc of chocolate marzipan. Crimp the edge between your fingers to give it an attractive finish. Tie the ribbon around the outside of the cake.
11. Space the marzipan balls evenly around the top of the cake and secure in place with a small dot of the reserved frosting. Pile the chocolate eggs into the centre of the cake.

Cook's notes

Take care not to over bake the cake or it may become dry and don't worry if the surface is uneven the frosting will cover it.

Once the frosting has cooled sufficiently, placing it into the refrigerator will speed up the setting.