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Vanilla Strawberry Whoopie Pies

Makes about 48 two-inch cakes.

Vanilla Whoopie Cakes

2-1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1-1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
4 tablespoons vegetable shortening
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup (packed) brown sugar
2 large eggs
1/2 cup buttermilk
2 tablespoons milk
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon white vinegar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract (see Note)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 375°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt onto a sheet of waxed paper.

In the work bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat together the butter, shortening, and both sugars until light and creamy, about 3 minutes. Add the eggs and the buttermilk and beat until combined.

In a measuring cup, combine the milk, baking soda, and vinegar. Add the milk mixture to the batter along with the flour mixture and beat on low until just combined. Add the vanilla and beat on medium for about 2 minutes until completely combined.

Using a spoon, drop about 1 tablespoon of batter onto one of the prepared baking sheets and repeat, spacing them at least 2 inches apart. Bake one sheet at a time for about 10 minutes each, or until the cakes begin to brown. Remove from the oven and let the cakes cool on the sheet for at least 5 minutes before transferring them to a rack to cool completely.

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Vanilla Strawberry Whoopie Pies, (continued)

Strawberry Buttercream Filling

2 cups confectioners' sugar
1/2 cup freeze-dried strawberries (see Note)
6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
3 tablespoons Marshmallow Fluff (or other prepared marshmallow cream, which will do in a pinch)
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons milk

In the work bowl of a food processor, pulse the sugar and the strawberries until the strawberries are crushed into very small pieces.

In the work bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat together the sugar-strawberry mixture, butter, vanilla, Marshmallow Fluff, flour, and milk, starting on low speed and increasing to medium. Scrape down the sides of the bowl occasionally and continue to beat until the mixture is smooth and creamy, about 4 minutes.

Note: Freeze-dried strawberries are a great ingredient in frostings and other fillings like this because they add a punch of intense, pure flavor without adding moisture.

Freeze-dried strawberries and other freeze-dried fruits and vegetables can be found at gourmet grocery stores like Whole Foods. We used Just Strawberries. Dried fruit can also be used but expect the fruit pieces to be bigger in the final filling and have a less intense fruit flavor.