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Published by Artisan, a division of Workman Publishing, New York, NY

Molten Chocolate-Raspberry Cakes

Serves 6

Have you ever ordered one of these sexy little desserts in a restaurant only to find that the anticipated molten center has morphed into cake instead of flowing sauce? Because small desserts are more easily overbaked than large ones, and because baking times vary with different kinds of chocolate, I've concluded that the best and simplest insurance against disappointment (congealed sauce) is the buried-truffle method. During the short time in the oven, the truffle in each small cake melts to form a luscious sauce, while the cake gets fully baked. Although it sounds like a completely separate step, the truffles are actually created with a portion of the cake batter, so the whole process is quite efficient.

INGREDIENTS:

Sugar for the custard cups
8 ounces (225 grams) 54% to 62% chocolate, coarsely chopped
6 tablespoons (85 grams) unsalted butter
1/4 cup (55 grams) strained raspberry puree (from fresh or frozen unsweetened raspberries)
3 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons (46 grams) sugar
2 tablespoons (12 grams) premium unsweetened cocoa powder (natural or Dutch process)
2 large eggs, separated
1 large egg white
1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar
Fresh raspberries for garnish (optional)
Powdered sugar for dusting

DIRECTIONS:

- Put a pie plate or cake pan in the freezer to chill. Liberally butter the insides of the custard cups, sprinkle with sugar, and top out the excess.
- Melt the chocolate and butter in a medium heatproof bowl in a wide skillet of barely simmering water, stirring frequently until smooth. Remove the bowl from the skillet. Transfer 5 tablespoons of the chocolate mixture to a small bowl and set aside the rest. Add the raspberry puree and 2 teaspoons (8 grams) of the sugar to the 5 tablespoons chocolate and stir to blend. Scrape the raspberry mixture into a puddle in the chilled pie plate or pan and place in the freezer for 10 minutes or so to firm.
- When the raspberry-chocolate mixture is firm enough to hold a shape, use a teaspoon (or a tiny ice cream scoop) to form it into 6 truffles (they need not be perfectly round). Return the truffles to the freezer.
- Rewarm the remaining chocolate mixture in the skillet of water over low heat until warm to the touch. Remove from the heat and whisk in the cocoa and egg yolks.

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- In a dry medium bowl, beat the egg whites and cream of tartar with an electric mixer until soft peaks form when the beaters are lifted. Gradually beat in the remaining 3 tablespoons (38 grams) sugar and continue beating until the whites are stiff and glossy but not dry. Fold about one-quarter of the egg whites into the batter. Scrape the remaining whites into the bowl and fold until blended. Using half of the batter, fill each cup about half-full. Press a truffle about halfway into the batter in the center of each cup. Top with the remaining batter and level the tops; make sure the truffles are completely covered by batter. Cover the cups with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 3 hours or up to 3 days.
- Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and preheat the oven to 400°F.
- Twenty minutes before you want to serve the cakes, remove the plastic wrap and place the cups on a cookie sheet. Bake for 12 to 14 minutes, until the cakes are puffed and the truffles are melted (a toothpick should feel warm rather than cool when you touch it to your lip). Let the cakes cool for about 3 minutes.
- Run a knife around the sides of each cup. Holding each cup with a pot holder, invert the cakes onto serving plates. Garnish with a few raspberries, if desired, and, using a fine-mesh strainer, sift a light dusting of powdered sugar over all. Serve immediately.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Six 6-ounce custard cups or ramekins

CHOCOLATE NOTE:

I originally developed this dessert using 55% chocolate and loved the outcome. But 62% chocolate made it even better because the difference in texture between the slightly cakey outside and the gooey inside is more pronounced and exciting.

To use a higher-percentage chocolate, adjust the recipe as follows:

To use 64% to 66% chocolate: Use 7-1/2 ounces (215 grams) chocolate. Add 2 teaspoons water to the raspberry puree. Increase the sugar added to the raspberry-chocolate mixture to 1 tablespoon (13 grams). Reduce the cocoa to 1 tablespoon (6 grams).

To use 70% to 72% chocolate: Use 7 ounces (200 grams) chocolate. Add 1 tablespoon water to the raspberry puree. Increase the sugar added to the raspberry-chocolate mixture to 1 tablespoon (13 grams). Omit the cocoa. Increase the sugar added to the egg whites to 4-1/2 tablespoons (55 grams).