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White Chocolate Mousse Cake

A step-by-step approach makes
this gorgeous cake easy as pie

BY SEBASTIAN BRECHT

Perfect cake with a
perfect glaze—
perfectly easy when
you allow enough
time to do each
step right.

I

make very elaborate cakes, but they're based on a simple philosophy: the cake must taste great and look great. I make that happen by designing cakes that give our senses what they want—contrast in flavors, textures, and colors. I pair dark colors with light ones, play flat and glossy surfaces against each other, offset acidic flavors with mild ones, and use bitterness to counterbalance sweetness.

Even though my cakes are complex, they're not out of the reach of an enthusiastic home cook. Careful planning, the right equipment, and a thorough

review of the recipe (days before you want to serve the cake) is all it takes to make beautiful cakes like this Floating Raspberry White Chocolate Mousse Cake. Best of all, you'll have the satisfaction of creating something that tastes better and is probably more attractive than anything you could buy at your local bakery.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

The cake has four separate components—cake base, mousse, raspberry purée, and dark chocolate glaze—

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FINE COOKING

The Taunton Press

FLOATING RASPBERRY WHITE CHOCOLATE MOUSSE CAKE

The list of equipment you'll need is neither long nor unusual, but these pieces are vital. You should have an electric mixer; several stainless-steel mixing bowls; a rubber spatula; a whisk; a 7-in. springform pan; an 8-in. cake pan; and a flat, narrow spatula about 9 in. long. Serves ten.

RASPBERRY PUREE

This part of the recipe calls for an 8-in. cake pan because that's the round pan most people have. However, since you'll only need a 5½-in. circle of purée, you won't use all the purée. Use a smaller round pan if you have one; just fill it to a depth of ¾ in.

12-oz. package frozen raspberries
1½ tsp. unflavored powdered gelatin
¼ cup sugar

Line an 8-in. cake pan with plastic wrap, leaving about 4 in. of excess plastic hanging over the pan's sides.

Defrost the berries until soft. Purée them in a food processor for about 30 seconds, or until smooth. Set a fine sieve over a small, nonreactive saucepan. Pour a small amount of the raspberry sauce in the sieve and force it through with a spatula. Repeat the process until you have strained all the raspberry purée. Sprinkle the gelatin over the purée. Allow the gelatin to soak and soften, about 5 min., and then stir. Heat the purée over medium heat and continue stirring until the gelatin melts completely. Add the sugar and stir until dissolved. Cool the raspberry mixture slightly and pour it into the plastic-lined cake pan. Freeze for an hour or until just set, and then drape the excess plastic over the top of the purée. Continue freezing for at least 12 hours. If you won't be using the purée within 24 hours, prevent freezer burn by popping it out of the pan and completely wrapping it in plastic or putting it in a plastic bag.

CHOCOLATE CAKE

The almond paste in this recipe keeps the cake moist.

1 large egg, room temperature
4 large egg yolks, room temperature
4 oz. (about ⅓ cup plus 1 Tbs.) almond paste,
crumbled

⅓ cup confectioners' sugar
2 Tbs. all-purpose flour
⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa
1 tsp. sugar

1 oz. (2 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled

CAKE COUNTDOWN

While this isn't a dessert you can whip up on a whim, you'll be surprised at how simple it is to make this cake when you break down the recipe into its basic components. No matter how you stagger the preparation, each step should be done within the recommended timetables.

Raspberry purée—two weeks to one day before assembly.
Chocolate cake—one week to one day before assembly. If you make the cake more than two days in advance, remove the cake from the pan and wrap it in plastic to keep it moist.

White chocolate mousse—immediately before assembly.
When you make the mousse, the cake and purée should already be prepared.

Assembly—one week to nine hours before serving. If you're going to assemble the cake more than 48 hours before serving it, wrap the assembled cake and freeze it. Defrost it in the refrigerator overnight before you glaze it.

Chocolate glaze—at least an hour before serving, but you must pour it on the cake immediately.

The glazed cake may wait in the refrigerator for one day to an hour before serving, or you may wrap it

and freeze it for a week. The cake should be frozen only once, however, so if you've frozen it during an earlier stage, don't freeze it again.

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A sieve is all you need to create a smooth berry sauce. Frozen raspberries are softened, puréed, and sieved to create a raspberry sauce. The sauce is the base for the cake's "floating" raspberry center.

but none are difficult to make. The trickiest element is timing the preparation. Even the most experienced pastry chef couldn't whip up this cake in one day (see the sidebar at right). You can spread the cake's preparation over as few as three days to as long as two weeks. In any case, follow the recipe's guidelines regarding advance (or last-minute) preparation and assembly. If the finished cake is well wrapped, you can freeze it for over a week with no quality loss. Once defrosted, it should be eaten within a couple of days.

This white chocolate mousse cake has everything it needs to be a great dessert. The base is a chocolate cake made with almond paste. It's dark and moist, mildly sweet, and has the distinctive flavors of chocolate and almond. The delicate white chocolate mousse is light, soft, and mellow in both sweetness and flavor. However, the mousse suspends a raspberry purée that's been set with a touch of gelatin. This fruit layer is intense in both its color and its acidic flavor. The final touch is a glaze of melted chocolate on top of the cake; it provides a startling bittersweet chocolate flavor, firm texture, and color that stands out in contrast to the white chocolate mousse.

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Put the chocolate in a metal bowl (1 qt. or larger) that will fit snugly over a saucepan. (You also can use a double boiler.) Fill the saucepan with 1 in. of water and heat it until it's on the verge of simmering. Remove the pan from the heat and set the bowl of chocolate on top of the saucepan. Stir the chocolate with a rubber spatula to encourage melting; however, don't be concerned if the chocolate doesn't melt entirely.

Pour 1/4 cup water in another saucepan and sprinkle in the gelatin. Let the gelatin soak for 5 min., and then set the saucepan over medium heat and stir until the gelatin dissolves.

Pour 1/2 cup of the cream in another small saucepan and bring it to a boil. Remove the saucepan from the heat immediately.

Add the gelatin to the hot cream and stir until well mixed. Add this mixture to the melted chocolate and stir well with a spatula until the mixture is very smooth. Remove the bowl from the pan and allow the chocolate mixture to cool until it's just warm.

Use an electric mixer to whip 2 cups cream until it just holds stiff peaks. Use a rubber spatula to gently fold half of the whipped cream into the slightly warm chocolate mixture. Add the remaining whipped cream and fold gently until smooth. Don't overfold the mixture; it should still have a few distinct streaks of white chocolate and whipped cream.

CHOCOLATE GLAZE

Don't be nervous about pouring chocolate over your beautiful smooth, white cake; not only will it make your dessert prettier, but it's also a lot of fun. The honey is optional, but it adds a subtle flavor and sheen to the glaze.

1 oz. good-quality dark chocolate (I prefer extra-bittersweet Callebaut), chopped fine

1/3 cup heavy cream
1 tsp. honey (optional)

Put the chocolate in a small bowl. Heat the cream and honey in a small saucepan until simmering, and then remove the pan from the heat. Very slowly, pour a thin, steady stream of the hot cream onto the chocolate, stirring constantly with a rubber spatula until the glaze reaches the desired consistency. (Don't use a whisk; it creates unwanted air bubbles.) You probably won't use all the cream; you want just enough to create a glaze that is fluid enough to pour easily but has enough body to set properly. The mixture should be slightly thicker than heavy cream.

ASSEMBLING THE CAKE

Remove the cake in the springform pan from the refrigerator. (If you've already removed the cake from the pan, unwrap the cake layer and put it back in the pan now.) Spoon in half of the white chocolate mousse over the cake layer, until the mousse fills the springform pan a little more than halfway. Use a rubber spatula to smooth the mousse.

An impressive effect from a simple technique. To make the raspberry purée "float," begin by spooning half of the white chocolate mousse over the cake layer in the springform pan. Set the circle of raspberry purée in the pan's center and push it into the mousse until the purée is at the middle of the pan. The mousse will rise around the purée and up the pan's sides.

Covering the evidence. To complete the illusion of the floating raspberry, add the remaining mousse to the springform pan; it will exceed the top of the pan. Then use the pan's edges to guide a large metal spatula across the top of the cake to smooth it.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Butter and flour only the base of a 7-in. springform pan, or line it with a circle of kitchen parchment.

Put the egg, yolks, almond paste, and confectioners' sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer. Mix at medium-low speed until smooth, thick, and pale, about 5 min.

Sift together the flour, cocoa, and sugar. Add these to the egg mixture and stir until just combined. Add the butter and mix for another 5 seconds, or until just combined. Spoon the batter into the pan; it will be very stiff. Smooth the top. Bake the cake for 8 min., or just until firm to the touch; do not overbake. (When you insert a toothpick, it will come out with wet crumbs.) Cool it completely and, with the cake still in the pan, cover the top of the pan with plastic wrap. Store it in the refrigerator until you're ready to use it.

You don't need to remove the cake from

the pan unless you're making it more than two days in advance of assembly. In that case, release the cake from the pan, thoroughly wrap the cake layer in plastic, and keep it in the refrigerator.

WHITE CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

An airy texture is key to the mousse's role in the dessert, so be careful when whipping the heavy cream. When using an electric mixer, there's very little time difference between whipped cream that's just shy of stiff peaks and cream that's on the verge of becoming butter.

8 oz. good-quality white chocolate
(I prefer Callebaut), chopped fine

1/4 cup water
1 envelope unflavored powdered gelatin
2 1/2 cups heavy cream

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Hot cream and good chocolate create a glossy glaze.

Start by slowly pouring the simmering cream onto finely chopped chocolate. Stir until smooth with a rubber spatula—don't use a whisk, which would create air bubbles. Add a little more cream, if necessary, to the melted chocolate to make a glaze that has body but is fluid enough to pour easily.

Don't be afraid to pour warm chocolate on top of the cake; the chilled white chocolate mousse can

stand up to the pressure. Pour the chocolate glaze on top of the mousse cake and rotate the cake so glaze runs and coats the entire surface. Don't worry if the glaze drips over the pan's edges. The cake needs just another half hour in the refrigerator before it's ready to serve.

must defrost it in the refrigerator overnight before you glaze it.)

Remove the cake, still in the pan, from the refrigerator. Pour the hot glaze on top. (If the glaze isn't fluid enough to run easily over the top of the cake, add a little more hot cream.) Rotate the cake so that the glaze covers the entire surface (see photo at right). Some of the glaze may drip over the pan; that's fine. If any bubbles appear on the glaze's surface, quickly and gently pierce them with the tip of a small, sharp knife. Return the cake to refrigerator for at least half an hour before you unmold it.

When you're ready to serve the cake, loosen the pan by heating it gently with a hair dryer on medium heat, directing the hot air around the sides of the springform pan. Use a back-and-forth motion and be careful not to overheat. It should take no more than 10 to 15 seconds for the pan to sufficiently loosen. Carefully slide the long, narrow spatula between the cake and the pan's sides to make sure the cake is ready to be removed from the pan. Unsnap the springform pan, remove the cake, and put it on a serving platter.

To cut the cake, heat a thin, sharp knife with a hair dryer or the flame of a gas stove. Slice the cake gently using single downward motions, one piece at a time, and arrange the slices on individual plates. If you like, decorate with fresh raspberries and white chocolate leaves.

Sebastian Brecht is a graduate of the French Culinary Institute in Manhattan. Once the pastry chef of four-star restaurants, he now supplies unique desserts to Dean & DeLuca, as well as to several catering companies. •

Remove the raspberry purée from the freezer and unwrap it. Use a 5 1/2-inch flan ring to cut a smaller circle from the purée. (You also can use a small plate as a template, or merely "eyeball" it, and cut a circle with the tip of a sharp knife.) Lay the purée circle in the center of the springform pan and push it into the mousse until it

“floats” approximately in the middle of the pan (see top photo at left). The mousse should begin to rise around the purée and up the pan’s sides. Add the remaining mousse; it should slightly exceed the top of the pan. Using the pan’s edges as a guide, scrape a large metal spatula across the top to remove the excess and to smooth the top of the mousse (see bottom photo at left). Put the cake, uncovered, in the refrigerator for about

an hour to let the mousse set, and then cover the top with plastic wrap. The cake must be refrigerated for at least 8 hours before glazing. At this point, you can also freeze the cake for up to a week. (If you do freeze it, you

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