

Dark Chocolate Bourbon Salted Caramel Espresso Layer Cake

Makes one 4-layer cake for 12-16 servings

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Heidi
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Chocolate Cake:

Inspired by Beatty's Chocolate Cake by Ina Garten

- 3 Tablespoons white vinegar
- 1 1/2 cups whole milk, minus 3 Tablespoons, room temperature
- 3/4 cup avocado oil
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten at room temperature
- 1 Tablespoon vanilla extract
- 606 grams (3 cups) granulated sugar
- 339 grams (2 cups plus 2 Tablespoons) all-purpose flour
- 110 grams (1 cup plus 2 Tablespoons) cocoa powder
- 1 Tablespoon baking soda
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2 cups hot water
- 1 Tablespoon espresso powder
- Chocolate-covered espresso beans, for garnish
- 4 8-inch round cake pans
- Non-stick baking spray and parchment paper for preparing cake pans

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Using your cake pan as a guide, cut four 8-inch round circles out of parchment paper. Spray all cake pans with non-stick spray and place your cut parchment round at the bottom of each cake pan. Set aside.
2. In large liquid measuring cup with spout, pour in white vinegar. In same measuring cup, add whole milk until it reaches the 1 1/2 cup mark. Stir together and set aside for 10 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with paddle attachment, sift together the sugar, all-purpose flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, baking powder and salt. Mix together on low speed until combined.
4. After the milk and vinegar combination has thickened, add the avocado oil, eggs and vanilla extract.
5. With the mixer running at low speed, slowly add the liquid ingredients to the dry ingredients until thoroughly combined. Do not overmix.
6. Stir espresso powder and hot water together until the espresso powder has dissolved.
7. Remove bowl from mixer and using a spatula, slowly stir the coffee into the batter until just combined. Do not overmix.
8. Divide batter evenly between the prepared cake pans and bake for 30-35 minutes or until tops feel firm and a toothpick comes out clean from the center of the cakes.
9. Allow cakes to cool for 15 minutes then carefully remove from cake pans to allow them to finish cooling on cooling rack. Once the layers are fully cool they are ready to frost.

Chocolate Ganache:

- 5 oz good quality semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 180 ml (3/4 cup) heavy cream
- Pinch of salt

Instructions:

Place the chopped chocolate in small heatproof bowl and set aside. In a saucepan over medium heat, bring the heavy cream and salt just under a boil, or until you see small bubbles forming along the sides of the pan. Pour over chopped chocolate and let sit for one minute. Slowly whisk the chocolate and cream together, starting in the middle and slowly whisking outwards, until the chocolate is completely melted and smooth. Set aside to thicken at room temperature.

Bourbon Salted Caramel:

Adapted from America's Test Kitchen

- 200 grams (1 cup) granulated sugar
- 60ml (1/4 cup) water
- 2 Tablespoons light corn syrup
- 120 ml (1/2 cup) heavy cream
- 1 Tablespoon bourbon
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 3/4 teaspoon salt

Instructions:

1. Combine sugar, water and corn syrup in a small saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Do not stir. Cook until sugar mixture turns the color of straw, approximately 5 minutes, then reduce heat to low. Swirling occasionally to evenly cook the sugar, cook until the mixture turns amber in color, anywhere from 2-3 minutes. Be careful as it can burn quickly!
2. Carefully stir in heavy cream, bourbon, vanilla and salt and stir until smooth. Let cool at room temperature until it thickens.

Espresso Swiss Meringue Buttercream:

- 9 large egg whites, freshly divided from yolks
- 450 grams (2 1/4 cup) granulated sugar
- 2 1/2 cups (5 sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons vanilla bean paste
- 2 Tablespoons espresso powder, dissolved in 1 Tablespoon hot water

Instructions:

1. In the bowl of an electric mixer, whisk together egg whites and granulated sugar until combined. Set bowl on top of pot filled with 2-inches of simmering water and whisk egg white and sugar mixture constantly until the sugar has dissolved completely and egg whites have warmed to 160 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Return bowl to mixer fitted with the whisk attachment and beat on medium-high speed until the meringue reaches the stiff peak stage and the bowl is no longer warm to the touch, approximately 10-15 minutes.
3. Switching to the paddle attachment at medium-low speed, add the salt, followed by the butter, one tablespoon at a time, ensuring butter is fully incorporated before adding the next piece. Once the butter is fully incorporated, add the vanilla bean paste and espresso. Increase speed to medium until the buttercream is thick, smooth and creamy.

Cake Assembly:

1. If necessary, trim any domes off of cake layers to create a flat surface.
2. Place one cake layer, top side up, onto a cake plate. Using a small offset spatula, spread one cup of espresso buttercream evenly over first layer. Pour 1/4 cup of bourbon salted caramel in the middle of the frosted cake layer and with offset spatula, spread evenly over cake leaving 1/2inch border around the edge.
3. Stack another cake layer on top of the first, top side up. Spread one cup of chocolate ganache evenly over second layer. Chill in the refrigerator for ten minutes. This ensures that the first two layers have time to firm up, making it easier to stack and frost the final layers.
4. After cake has briefly chilled, repeat step 2, evenly spreading the espresso buttercream and bourbon salted caramel over the third cake layer.
5. Add fourth and final cake layer, bottom side up, on top of the frosted third layer. Chill cake for 10 minutes to firm up the layers before adding crumb coat.
6. After the cake has chilled a second time, frost the entire cake with a thin layer of espresso buttercream. Smooth the sides and top of cake. It does not need to be perfect as you will go back and add more buttercream after the cake has chilled.
7. Chill crumb-coated cake for 30 minutes so that the cake will be nice and firm for your final coat of buttercream.
8. After the cake has chilled, add remaining espresso buttercream to the cake, frosting evenly over the sides and top of cake. Once frosted to your liking, chill in the refrigerator for 30 minutes. This will help ensure you get a perfect caramel drip on your cake!
9. Once the cake has chilled, carefully drizzle leftover bourbon salted caramel around the edge of the cake. Top with chopped chocolate covered espresso beans, if desired. The cake is best enjoyed at room temperature.

Storage:

Store any remaining cake wrapped well in plastic wrap in the fridge for up to one week. Leftover cake can also be frozen, well wrapped, for up to one month.

Make Ahead:

Each cake component can be made ahead making cake assembly very manageable!

- Cake layers: the cake can be made up to one day in advance and stored at room temperature, wrapped well in plastic wrap. You can also freeze the cake layers, well wrapped in plastic wrap, for up to one month.
- Espresso Buttercream: the buttercream can be made one day in advance and stored in an airtight container at room temperature. Briefly re-mix the buttercream on the lowest setting of your electric mixer right before you use it to smooth out any air bubbles.
- Chocolate Ganache: this can be made and stored in the refrigerator up to one week in advance. Bring to room temperature before using.
- Bourbon Salted Caramel: This can be made up to one week in advance and stored in the refrigerator. Bring to room temperature before using or briefly warm in the microwave for 30 seconds to achieve a nice, thick pourable consistency.