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Buche de Noel a holiday hit

By Susie Iventosch



Buche de Noel Photo Sora O'Doherty

One of our Lamorinda Weekly reporters and I love to exchange recipes. Sora O'Doherty is always sending delicious ideas my way, and a couple of months ago she sent me photos of her holiday sugar cookies, mincemeat tarts and Buche de Noel, along with a treasure trove of holiday recipes! I immediately knew that I'd have to try her Buche de Noel (yule log) chocolate cake. It's been one of my favorite holiday desserts ever since my first French class in junior high school.

"I don't really have one recipe for the Buche de Noel," Sora said. "I start with the Chocolate Cloud Roll by Rose Levy Beranbaum and then fill it with her Chestnut Mousse, or stabilized whipped cream and raspberry jam, then frost it with a chocolate buttercream and decorate it with meringue mushrooms and marzipan holly leaves. A dusting of icing sugar snow gives it the perfect finishing touch."

I thought my meringue mushrooms looked real, but Sora says that by blowing on the cocoa powder right after dusting the meringue, the mushrooms obtain an even more fantastically real look. I'll definitely give that a try next time.

Sora's recipe for the mushrooms came from the famous cookbook "Cocolat: Extraordinary Chocolate Desserts" by Alice Medrich. One time, when Sora was living in Ireland, she brought a basket of the meringue mushrooms to a party given by her friend Frank Duggan.

"His lovely wife, Geraldine, passed them around, but nobody took one," Sora recounted. "She then made a second pass, telling each guest that these were actually cookies. Once the truth was known, the meringues disappeared like snowflakes falling on a campfire."

I, too, loved the meringue mushrooms and they could easily be the featured dessert, if not for the amazing cake. Every year Sora's family asks for this Christmas dessert and she obliges them. No wonder. It is absolutely divine!

Since I am not a chestnut fan, I made the cake with a chocolate mousse filling and it was a big hit with my family. You can make this cake with whatever kind of filling your family enjoys from raspberry whipped cream to chestnut mousse, and the result will be perfect for your holiday dessert. If you use a whipped cream filling, consider adding a whipped cream stabilizer so that the whipped cream will hold up longer and won't weep.

Wishing you all a wonderful holiday season!

Cooking Term of the Week

Stabilized Whipped Cream

When using whipped cream in desserts it is a good idea to add a stabilizer if you want the cream to hold up for any length of time. Normally, whipped cream begins to wilt or weep after several hours, but with the addition of a stabilizer, it will hold up for days. I used a powdered stabilizer that I purchased at a cake decorating supply store for a wedding cake I made a couple of years ago, but you can also use bloomed plain gelatin to stabilize the whipped cream. Here is a link that illustrates how to do that:
<https://ourbestbites.com/2015/11/how-to-make-stabilized-whipped-cream/>.

Chocolate Cloud Roll

(Original recipe by Rose Levy Beranbaum)

INGREDIENTS

6 large eggs, separated

1/4 cup granulated sugar plus 2 Tbsp. granulated sugar

4 oz. semisweet chocolate

3/4 tsp. cream of tartar

1 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 F.

Line a jelly roll pan (approximately 12 x 17) with parchment, leaving a 1-inch overhang on longer sides. Butter the pan first, then butter and flour the parchment.

In a mixing bowl, combine egg yolks and 1/4 cup granulated sugar, beat until light yellow in color and fluffy (about 5 minutes). Add the melted chocolate and beat until incorporated.

In a separate mixing bowl, beat the egg whites until foamy, then add the cream of tartar. Beat until soft peaks form and then add 2 Tbsp. granulated sugar, continue beating until stiff peaks form.

Fold 1/4 egg whites into chocolate mixture until combined, then fold chocolate mixture into remaining egg whites, being careful not to deflate, until well combined. Pour batter into prepared pan, spreading evenly to all corners and sides. Bake 16 minutes.

Remove cake from oven, run a sharp knife around edges to free cake from pan. Sprinkle the top of the cake with 1 Tbsp. cocoa powder and immediately cover cake with a slightly damp clean dish towel and allow cake to cool.

Remove dish towel from cake, and using the parchment overhang on one of the long sides of the pan, gently slide cake from pan onto a flat surface.

Spread filling over cake and roll up from a narrow end using the parchment paper to guide the cake along. Cover tightly with foil and refrigerate until ready to frost and decorate. (Frosting recipe below.)

When ready to frost, cut a "branch" or two from the end of the cake and place on the sides, attaching with frosting to keep in place.

Frost cake leaving the ends of the branches exposed if you like. Using a fork, make bark-like marks on the frosting to look like a log.

Decorate with marzipan holly and berries and meringue mushrooms, or use real holiday greens to decorate the cake plate.

Serve slices of cake with a spoonful of chocolate sauce drizzled over the top.

Chocolate Mousse Filling

(See below for Chestnut Mousse Cream)

INGREDIENTS

2 egg whites

1/8 tsp. cream of tartar

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1 cup heavy cream, whipped

3 ounces bittersweet chocolate melted and cooled

1 tsp. vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

In a large bowl, beat egg whites with cream of tartar until soft peaks form. Slowly add sugar and continue to beat until very thick and stiff peaks form. Slowly and carefully, fold in melted chocolate and vanilla.

In a separate bowl, beat heavy cream until stiff peaks form. (Use a whipped cream stabilizer at this point.) Gently fold whipped cream into egg white mixture. Spread over cake and roll into log.

Chocolate Buttercream Frosting

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups butter, at room temperature (I used just one cup, half salted and half unsalted)

33/4 cups + 2 Tbsp. powdered sugar (I used just 3 cups of powdered sugar)

1/2 cup + 2 Tbsp. cocoa powder

3 - 4 Tbsp. heavy cream

1 tsp. vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

Whip butter in a large bowl (either in an electric stand mixer or with a hand-held beater) on moderately high speed until very pale (almost white in color) and fluffy, about 6 to 8 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl occasionally. Sift in cocoa powder and beat until well combined. Next, sift in powdered sugar, 3 Tbsp. heavy cream and vanilla and mix on low speed until combined. Add additional powdered sugar or cream, to arrive at desired consistency.

Spread frosting over chocolate roll, leaving one of the branches exposed if desired.

Meringue Mushrooms

(Recipe by Alice Medrich)

INGREDIENTS

4 large egg whites

1/4 tsp. cream of tartar

1 cup sugar (preferably superfine)

2 tsp. unsweetened cocoa

2 ounces bittersweet or semi-sweet chocolate, cut into small pieces

Equipment:

Cookie sheet lined with parchment paper

Pastry bag fitted with plain 1/2-inch tip, or you can use a baggie and cut off a corner for the pastry bag.

DIRECTIONS

Combine egg whites with cream of tartar in bowl of an electric mixer. Beat on medium speed until soft peaks form. Gradually sprinkle in sugar, beating at high speed until mixture is very stiff and dull looking.

Scrape meringue mixture into pastry bag. Pipe round, button shapes to make mushroom "caps." Pipe pointed "kiss" shapes about one inch tall to make "stems." Dust with cocoa. (This is where you want to gently blow on the cocoa powder to get a more natural look to the mushrooms.) Bake 2 hours in 200 F oven until crisp and completely dry.

Assemble the mushrooms: Place chocolate in a small bowl. Set bowl in a skillet of barely simmering water. Immediately turn off heat and stir chocolate until melted and smooth. Spread a little melted chocolate on the flat side of each meringue mushroom "cap." Use a sharp knife to cut off and discard the pointed ends of meringue "stems." Attach stems to caps while chocolate is still soft.

Set assembled mushrooms aside until the chocolate has dried and caps and stems are "glued" together. Meringue mushrooms may be made 3 to 4 weeks in advance and stored in an airtight container.

Bittersweet Chocolate Sauce

INGREDIENTS

1 cup of bittersweet chocolate chips

1/4-1/3 cup water

2 Tbsp. agave syrup

2 tsp. vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

Place chocolate chips in a small sauce pot. Add water, agave and vanilla. Heat over medium heat until all is melted. Bring to a boil and stir until well-incorporated. Remove from heat.

Chestnut Mousse Cream

(Recipe by Rose Levy Beranbaum, from Cake Bible)

INGREDIENTS

1 cup unsweetened chestnut puree

2/3 cup powdered sugar

2 Tbsp. dark rum

2 cups heavy cream

DIRECTIONS

Refrigerate the mixing bowl and beater for at least 15 minutes.

In a food processor fitted with the metal blade, process the puree, sugar and rum until smooth.

In the chilled bowl, beat the cream until beater marks just start to appear. Add the chestnut mixture and beat until stiff peaks form when the beater is raised.

Makes 5 cups

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