Published December 23rd, 2020

This coconut-lovers' cake is perfect for the holiday season

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King of Coconut Cake with Cream Cheese Frosting Photos Susie Iventosch

I love coconut! People usually have very strong opinions about coconut . they either love it or hate it, but rarely do you find a person who is ambivalent about coconut. I can't get enough of it, whether it's in macaroons, a Ritter Sport candy bar, 7-layer bar cookies, or even as a condiment for chicken curry. It's especially good when paired with coconut cream cheese frosting on this layer cake.

This cake is super moist, and I think the reason is because it's made with sweetened cream of coconut, like a Coco Lopez or Real Gourmet Cream of Coconut . the kind your friendly bartender uses in Pina Coladas. I use it in both the cake itself and the frosting. And, if I happen to have a little bit of extra on hand, I sometimes spread a thin amount on the middle layers before covering them with frosting.

For this cake, I also added a chocolate element by mixing a portion of the cream cheese frosting with chocolate. This was kind of a fun alternative and you can also add your own little twist by spreading a thin layer of raspberry or your favorite jam between the layers before frosting them, It's delightful with a hint of lime, too, for a summer twist on this cake.

If you branch out to add your own touches, please email me to tell me what you did to make your coconut cake just perfect for you!

King of Coconut Cake with Cream Cheese Frosting

Ingredients

2 3/4 cup all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 cup (2 sticks or 8 oz.) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 3/4 cups granulated sugar

1 cup canned, sweetened cream of coconut, such as Coco Casa Coconut Cream

4 large eggs, separated

Pinch of salt

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 cup buttermilk

Cream Cheese Frosting (recipe below)

4 cups sweetened, shredded coconut

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 F. Line two 9-inch cake pans with parchment paper. Lightly spray paper with cooking spray. If you use the magic baking strips, dampen them and wrap them around the sides of each of the pans according to the directions. This will really help to bake a nice even cake. (Thanks to Sora O'Doherty for this great tip!)

Separate egg whites and yolks. Put whites in a mixing bowl and yolks in a small bowl.

In a medium bowl, mix flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt to blend. Set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, cream butter together with sugar until light and fluffy. Add coconut cream and continue to beat until well-integrated. Beat in egg yolks and vanilla. On low speed beat in dry ingredients alternately with buttermilk, starting and ending with dries.

Using clean, dry beaters, beat egg whites with a pinch of salt in the separate bowl until stiff, but not too dry. Gently fold beaten egg whites into cake batter.

Divide cake batter evenly between the two prepared pans. Bake cakes until tester inserted into cakes comes out clean. Anywhere from 25-35 minutes, depending on your oven. When done, remove cakes from oven. Cool cakes on rack for about 10 minutes. Then run a sharp knife around the edges to loosen cakes. Remove cakes from pans to racks, and cool completely.

To Assemble

With a long bread knife, cut each cake layer in half horizontally. Place first half layer on plate. Spread chocolate coconut frosting over this layer and lay other half layer on top. Spread plain coconut frosting on top of this first whole layer. Then sprinkle 1/4 cup of shredded coconut over the plain frosting. Repeat the process with each half layer, ending with cream cheese frosting on top of cake. Spread remaining frosting all around sides of cake. Completely cover sides of cake with shredded coconut and pat gently into frosting with the palm of your hands. If you want to go all out, cover the top of the cake with shredded coconut too!

Cream of Coco Cream Cheese Frosting

INGREDIENTS

1 8-oz. packages cream cheese, softened to room temperature

1 stick unsalted butter, at room temperature

3-4 cups powdered sugar, sifted

1/2 cup canned, sweetened cream of coconut

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

For the chocolate frosting for between the layers:

2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder, or 2 oz. bittersweet chocolate, melted and cooled

DIRECTIONS

In a large bowl, beat cream cheese with butter until fluffy. Add powdered sugar, alternately with cream of coconut and beat until fluffy and well-blended with each addition. Add more or less powdered sugar to arrive at desired spreading consistency. Add vanilla and beat once more.

For the filling, separate out about 1 cup of the frosting and blend in either the cocoa powder or the melted and cooled bittersweet chocolate. This will be the frosting for between the half layers of cake!

Photos Susie Iventosch

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