

What's better than a Bundt with a perfect toffee crunch?



Photo Susie Iventosch

Chocolate Bundt Cake with Brown Butter Icing and Toffee Bits

By Susie Iventosch

This dark chocolate Bundt cake is the perfect holiday dessert, complete with brown butter icing and bits of English toffee scattered over the top. Whenever I think of toffee, I think of holiday cookie baking and candy making, and English toffee is one of my favorites. I am not so good at making it, but I sure do love eating it. So, whenever a friend brings me a batch, I am always so thankful and overjoyed.

As you know, we also love to bake with brown butter. It makes everything taste special

with the rich nutty flavor and the delicious aroma. It's nice to have on hand to use for baking, on potatoes, veggies or pasta and especially in cakes and frosting. If possible, make the brown butter ahead of time and chill it until you're ready to use it. This will save a lot of time when making the icing. We like to brown a few sticks of butter whenever we have time and keep it in the refrigerator until we want to make something with it.

Please note that butter loses much of its water content when you brown it, so be sure to weigh or measure the butter for the recipe after browning

it. For this recipe, 4 ounces of butter turned into 2 ounces after it was browned. The amount of water in the butter you use will determine how much volume is lost, and every brand of butter differs slightly.

Since we have not received any gifts of toffee yet this year, I used Trader Joe's holiday English Toffee with Nuts for this cake, which comes in a gigantic 30-ounce tin, and is deliciously crunchy.

But if you make toffee, by all means use your own, and if you're lucky enough to have a friend that remembers you at the holiday season with a gift of toffee, then you're all set!

INGREDIENTS

Chocolate Bundt Cake

8 oz. unsalted butter (1 cup or 2 sticks)
1/3 cup cocoa powder Dutch processed
1 cup water
2 oz. dark chocolate, chopped (weuse 62% cacao)
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 3/4 cup granulated sugar
1 1/2 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. salt
2 large eggs
1/2 cup plain nonfat Greek yogurt
1 tsp. cider vinegar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Brown Butter Icing

4 oz. unsalted butter
2 cups powdered sugar, sifted
5 tbsp. milk +/-
Toffee Bits
1 1/2 cups English toffee, chopped

DIRECTIONS

Chocolate Bundt Cake

Spray or grease a 12-cup Bundt pan and dust with flour. Set aside. Preheat oven to 350 F. Combine butter, cocoa powder, chopped dark chocolate, and water in a saucepan and cook over medium-low heat, stirring often, just until melted. Remove from heat and set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, combine flour, sugar, salt and baking soda and whisk together to combine. Add half of the chocolate mixture to the dries and stir well. Add remaining chocolate mixture to the batter and stir until completely blended.

Add eggs, one at a time, stir well after each. Whisk in yogurt, cider vinegar and vanilla, and blend well.

Pour batter into prepared pan and bake in the center of the oven for 30-35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Remove from oven and cool for 15 minutes before inverting onto a cooling rack. When the cake is completely cooled, move it to the cake serving plate.

While the cake is cooling, prepare the icing and chop the toffee.

Brown Butter Icing

I like to brown the butter ahead of time, so when I'm ready to make the icing it's ready to go quickly. But, to brown the butter, place it in a pan with a light-colored bottom. (This way you can see when the butter is brown.) Cook over low heat for 10-15 minutes, or until the butter takes on a nutty aroma and begins to form bubbles and brown crystals along the edge and on the bottom of the pan. Remove from heat and cool. This can take a longer or shorter amount of time, depending upon the water content of the butter you use, as well as the temperature of your burner. Allow the butter to cool completely.

Beat or whisk the brown butter with the powdered sugar and milk until smooth and the icing is the consistency where you can drizzle the icing, but it will hold as it falls down the cake. This should be somewhere between frosting and glaze consistency. Drizzle the icing over the entire top of the cake. The icing will drip down into the center and along the sides of the cake.

Evenly sprinkle toffee bits over the icing while it is still soft and a bit moist, so that the toffee will hold in place. Serve cake at room temp.



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Family Gingerbread House Building event brings out the architect in everyone



The Enfield family architects hard at work Photos Vera Kochan

By Vera Kochan

The Moraga Parks and Recreation Department initiated Family Gingerbread House Building three years ago, but COVID mandates made group

gatherings an impossibility for the first two years. Instead, the all-in-one kits were sold for families to assemble in the safety of their own homes. This year the Dec. 4 "construction site" was held at the Hacienda de las Flores' Casita building.



The Stewart family builds their gingerbread houses

Recreation Supervisor Jasmine Bateson said that the sold-out event expected to see 45 families in three time slots, build gingerbread houses decorated with pretzels, gum drops, mini-marshmallows, peppermint candy, M&Ms,

licorice, green or red frosting, and more for a price of \$35 per family and \$20 for each additional house.

As can be expected, the younger participants ate more of the decorations than they put on their houses. One father

was heard saying to his daughter, "We're not here to eat; we're here to build."

Any parents who brought toddlers ended up creating the dream houses by themselves as their youngsters happily watched while munching on the candy (er, the building supplies). No one seemed put out by the turn of events. If anything, the adults appeared to be enjoying their own creativity even as the stock seemed to noticeably dwindle in record time – a clear case of supply and demand.

One builder, Layla (5), had constructed gingerbread houses at home before. She planned on using all of her will-power by not eating the day's masterpiece, but rather putting her latest endeavor near the fireplace by the Christmas tree, at least for one day. Her sister, Sofia (2), alas, fell victim to the munchies.

New cookbook offers a wealth of delicious holiday side dishes



Hericots verts with roasted fennel and shallots

Photo provided

By Jennifer Wake

The holidays are the one time of year that brings all of Moraga resident Craig McMullen's family and friends together, and for these festive occasions, as an amateur chef, McMullen has taken the opportunity to create a considerable number of side dishes. "Over the years I have experimented and swapped new ideas into our rotation and made adjustments to other recipes, year after year keeping notes and using my family's feedback to perfect the holiday meal."

During the pandemic, McMullen – a retired biotechnology CEO who has been tinkering around the kitchen "for as long as I can remember" and cooks almost every night – sat down and selected some of the more popular side dishes from the past 30 years and wrote his own cookbook, "Sides for Holiday Entertaining."

"My side dishes range from a single vegetable dish to make ahead gratins, and

purees, impressive and delectable souffles, terrines, and delicious and surprising combinations of vegetables," McMullen said, adding that each recipe has a handy make-ahead note which offers convenient stopping places that may be the day ahead, prepped in the morning, or finished just before the meal is served.

One of his most complicated dishes is a broccoli soufflé, which McMullen says many amateur cooks think is too complicated to try at home. "I have developed several helpful preparation steps and hints along the way to take the mystery out of making a soufflé and incorporated them into my cookbook," he said. "Additionally, there are two pages of step-by-step illustrations to guide you through its preparation." He said he has found it very gratifying when he's met a reader who has successfully made their first soufflé. "One of my friends who was an

early editor [of my cookbook] tried my soufflé recipe to check out the book and was surprised by his success and has become a true supporter."

Finishing his manuscript was a significant accomplishment only to learn that this was just the beginning if McMullen wanted to publish a cookbook. "Photography became a real adventure and I had over 30 photoshoots," he said. "I was very lucky to learn that a close friend was a talented amateur photographer with the correct equipment and knowledge of lighting. Together we set out to learn food photography and it was fun and a real learning experience."

"Sides for Holiday Entertaining" is available at Amazon as well as being sold locally at Across the Way in Moraga, Diablo Foods, and at the Lazy K at Orchard Nursery in Lafayette. For info, visit sidesforholidayentertaining.com