

Create a delicious summer garden with these fun sunflower cupcakes



Sunflower Chocolate Cupcakes

Photo Susie Iventosch

By Susie Iventosch

Our friend Mariela has a beautiful website called The Hungry Dragonfly, and while she creates all sorts of savory, sweet and vegan recipes, she is a fantastic cake decorator. Recently, she posted a video of how to make these fun sunflower cupcakes using her favorite buttercream frosting. We fell in love with them, especially since we had wild sunflowers blooming all over our neighborhood for the past month or so. I have to admit, I'm still a novice when it comes to using cake decorating tips successfully, but I think these turned out pretty well and they looked so cute up against our real sunflowers in the garden. We used our favorite chocolate cake recipe for these cupcakes along with Mariela's buttercream frosting, and they were delicious.

When it comes to cake decorating, there are many different tips available. For these flowers, I used a #352 leaf tip for both the petals and the leaves. Also, you want to make sure your frosting is not too hot or too cold. We were having a heat spell when I made these, so I had to keep putting the cupcakes in the refrigerator in between the different layers of petals. I did the same thing with the frosting, but had to be careful not to get it too cold or too firm. It takes a little bit of practice, but you'll get the hang of it. I like to point the tip so that the first circle of petals is vertical and the second circle of petals is horizontal, which makes the flowers look nice and full.

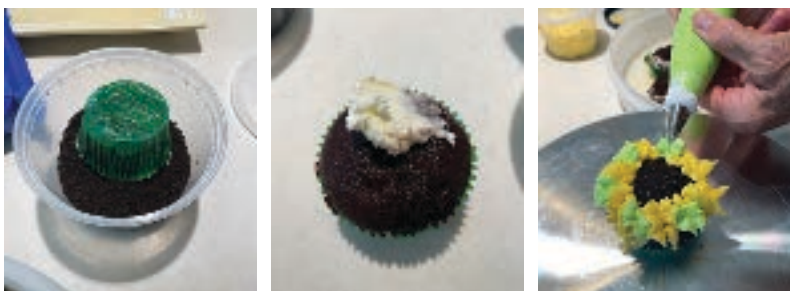
The center of the sunflower is made from crushed Oreo Cookies, and you simply take a little frosting and

spread it in the center of the top of the cupcake and then immediately dip the top in the crushed cookies. Be sure to leave at least a quarter-inch edge of the top of the cupcake with no frosting or cookie crumbs. I inadvertently covered the entire top of the cupcake with frosting and crumbs at first, but the yellow petals did not adhere very well. I had to scrape some off to leave a cake edge around the top of the cupcake. Learning from my mistake, be sure to have just plain cupcake around the very outside circle of the cupcake.

You will need two bakery piping bags and two leaf cake decorating tips (#352 is a good one for this) with complementary couplers for decorating these cupcakes with the sunflowers. All of these should be available at your local craft store and you can certainly order them online. Wilton is a great line of cake decorating supplies.

I really like using gel food coloring best, and you can get a variety of colors at Michael's, Hobby Lobby or on Amazon. We mixed our yellow with a little bit of orange to try to match the color of the real flowers in our garden. You can certainly use regular liquid food coloring too, but you can get a much larger variety of colors in the gels. Wilton offers a nice set of 12 different colors for \$16.99, (see link) and from that you can make nearly any color you like for future baking projects, too. They are also available on Amazon.

If you have any questions as you make your sunflower cupcakes, please be sure to email me and I'll do my best to help you make some beautiful, festive sunflower cupcakes!



Sunflower Chocolate Cupcakes

(Makes 24 regular cupcakes)

Frosting

INGREDIENTS

1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature (2 sticks or 8 oz.)
4 cups powdered sugar, sifted
1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. cream of tartar
2 tbsp. heavy cream or milk
1 tsp. Vanilla
Gel food coloring in yellow and green (and maybe orange if you like a more golden yellow)

DIRECTIONS

Sift powdered sugar with salt and cream of tartar. Set aside.

Place the butter in the bowl of your standing mixer and using the paddle attachment, beat butter for 3-5 minutes, or until light and fluffy. Beat in vanilla. Gradually add powdered sugar alternately with milk or cream, and continue until you have the consistency you like for your frosting. I always save a little extra powdered sugar aside in case the frosting gets too soft.

Dye one quarter of the frosting green and three quarters of the frosting yellow. Use the yellow to spread on top of the cupcake and for the sunflower petals and the green for the leaves.

Cupcakes

INGREDIENTS

3 cups all-purpose flour
2 cups granulated sugar
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
2 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. salt
2 cups cold water
1 cup canola oil
2 tsp. vanilla extract
1 cup bittersweet chocolate chips
1 cup pulverized Oreo Cookies (for the center of the flowers)

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

Line cupcake tin with cute cupcake liners that are appropriate for the occasion. Lightly spray the inside of the liners with cooking spray. We used green and yellow liners for these sunflower cupcakes. You will either need a cupcake tin that holds 24 or use two tins with 12 each. You can make half a recipe, too, if you only want 12 cupcakes or you can bake these in two batches if you only have one tin. (The frosting stores well in the refrigerator for a couple of weeks.)

Place all dries (flour, sugar, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt) in a large mixing bowl. Blend well with a wire whisk.

Add oil, water and vanilla to dries and mix well to incorporate. Stir in chocolate chips. Divide batter evenly among the prepared cupcake tins. Bake for about 15 minutes, or until the tops of the cupcakes hold their shape when you gently push with your finger. (Using a cake tester is tough because the chocolate chips will remain gooey until the cupcakes are completely cooled.) Remove from oven and cool completely before frosting.

When ready to frost, spread a little circle of frosting in the center top of each cupcake and then immediately invert the cupcake into the bowl of crushed Oreos. Set each cupcake aside after doing the Oreo centers.

Working around the edge of each cupcake, use the yellow frosting with the leaf tip to make your petals. I like to make vertical petals all the way around the edge, and follow up with horizontal petals just inside of that. When you're happy with your yellow petals, make a few green leaves here and there. Store in an airtight container and refrigerate frosted cupcakes until ready to serve.

Find Mariela's creations on Instagram

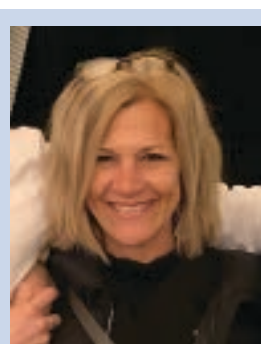
@thehungrydragonfly Or, her website:

<https://thehungrydragonfly.com/2023/05/30/the-best-buttercream-frosting/>

How to make frosting leaves: <https://youtu.be/Bw1X8NOR19k>

How to make sunflower petals: <https://wilton.com/how-to-pipe-a-sunflower/witech-139/#:~:text=Switch%20to%20a%20bag%20fitted,to%20create%20a%20fuller%20look.>

Wilton 12-piece Food Coloring Gel set: <https://wilton.com/edible-gel-food-coloring-set-for-baking-and-decorating-6-oz-12-piece-set/191007589/>



Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977. Or visit <https://treksandbites.com>

What is dementia?

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson

My mother cannot remember anything. She must have dementia! This might be wrong. Just because someone is past a certain age and having problems with short-term memory does not necessarily mean she has a dementia; it could actually be an infection, dehydration, depression or another reversible cause. That is why a good evaluation is necessary before you just accept her deficit without a real diagnosis.

What else could it be?

Often an individual gets a diagnosis of "cognitive impairment" because their thinking and remembering is not in the observable normal range. This issue can be the result of a high fever, infection, medications, brain tumor or a progressing neurological condition. This might be a temporary condition called delirium.

MCI or mild cognitive im-

pairment is often a precursor to Alzheimer's disease. In order to have this diagnosis one must have been given a test (such as the "MoCA") that shows impaired thinking ability and this is observable by family and friends. Many individuals with this diagnosis never progress to Alzheimer's disease, and they seem to learn to live with the short-term memory loss.

All individuals with MCI should look at changing their lifestyles to preserve their cognition, if possible. That change means adopting a healthy brain diet. The Mediterranean Diet, MIND diet or an anti-inflammatory diet are favored. Before making, any changes consult with your physician.

The other four areas needed for a healthy brain are: 1) Exercise: Get moving at least 30 minutes a day. 2) Mindfulness: in any form will do. 3) Socialization: If possible should be something that has the individual interacting with

others – volunteering, classroom learning, and lectures are some to consider. 4) Brain games: Examples include Sudoku, word searches, Lumosity, and more. When we learn new information, it becomes the catalyst for "neurogenesis" – gaining new brain cells.

From MCI to Dementia

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) moves into Dementia once the individual needs help with one of the activities of daily living – this could be anything from personal care to getting lost while driving. So, now the individual is having trouble with memory and thinking and has one other deficit. This move does not necessarily tell medical providers what type of dementia or illness is occurring, which could be important to know for planning and treatment. That level of diagnosis will take further evaluation and testing.

This disease poses a challenge for everyone in the fam-

ily as well as for the person with MCI or early dementia. It is important to get coaching and guidance early in the process. An Aging Life Care Professional (www.aginglifecare.org) could be a helpful resource for everyone. We want to focus on the quality of life and living each day with joy, despite a progressive illness. There are support groups for caregivers, as well as those with the diagnosis – your local Alzheimer's Association is a great resource. My book, "The Empowered Caregiver," available on Amazon, is a resource adult children of aging parents need in order to be prepared to address the challenges to come, especially if you are dealing with any cognitive changes in a parent.

My next free Zoom class will be at 11 a.m. Friday, Aug. 11. The subject: "Dementia: From Diagnosis to Family Care." This is one of five free Zoom classes for families where dementia is a concern.



Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC, is a Licensed Family Therapist and Certified Care Manager. She has been practicing professional care management since 1984. Linda founded Eldercare Services, a full-service care management and home care company in 1989. Eldercare Services is now a division of Home Care Assistance and continues to provide Bay Area families with care management, advocacy, counseling, support groups and education.

To register for my classes or newsletter enroll at www.LindaFodriniJohnson.com.



Moraga 8th-graders meet Congressman in D.C.

Submitted by Kena Hudson

The graduating class of eighth-graders at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School traveled to Washington D.C. the week of

June 12 with their teachers Ms. McDevitt and Ms. Warmboe and met with U.S. Congressman Mark DeSaulnier. These students will be headed to Campbell High School as incoming freshmen this fall.

Photo provided