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A Chocolate Celebration

The way you eat should enhance your health as well as enable you to fully enjoy meals when you dine with friends and relatives. Having an occasional rich, decadent dessert at the end of a special meal is definitely a tradition, but one that should be the exception and not the rule.

If your daily diet is as pleasurable as it is healthy, making sound eating choices

won't be a chore. Keep in mind that healthy eating doesn't exclude delicious treats. Consider high-quality dark chocolate and cocoa as ingredients, limit the sugar, and keep in mind moderation and small portions when preparing the following chocolate desserts.

Here are six dark chocolate recipes to celebrate the chocolate lover in all of us!



Classic Chocolate Pudding

This version of a classic favorite is dairy-free, gluten-free and vegan. Cocoa powder and dark chocolate intensify the pudding flavor; this is a good way to enjoy the health benefits of chocolate. Perhaps the best nutrition news of the last 20 years is the widespread acknowledgement that chocolate – once considered no healthier than other candy – is actually beneficial for the cardiovascular system. Chocolate contains flavanols, antioxidants that appear to lower blood pressure, improve blood flow and reduce the risk of blood clots.

Ingredients

1 1/2 cups evaporated cane sugar
1 cup unsweetened natural cocoa powder
1 tablespoon cornstarch, plus 2 1/4 teaspoons cornstarch
3 1/2 cups plain soy milk
9 ounces 70% organic dark chocolate, coarsely chopped
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Vanilla bean seeds, scraped from 1 halved vanilla bean
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/3 cup coarsely chopped pistachios
1/3 cup coarsely chopped walnuts

Directions

1. Fill a large bowl with ice and water. Set aside.
2. Combine the sugar, cocoa powder, and cornstarch in a saucepan. Whisk in half of the soy milk to create a smooth paste. Add the remaining soy milk and whisk to combine. Place over medium-high heat. Stirring constantly, bring the mixture to a simmer. Remove from the heat and whisk in the chocolate, vanilla extract, vanilla bean seeds, and cinnamon.
3. Strain the pudding mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl. Immediately set the bowl in the ice bath to cool down



the pudding. Place a piece of plastic wrap directly on the pudding surface to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours before serving.

4. Divide the pudding among four to six 6-ounce bowls or ramekins. Top with the pistachios and walnuts and serve.

Makes 4-6 Servings



Chocolate Flourless Cake & Berry Compote

Made with high-quality, unadulterated dark chocolate and luscious almond butter, this cake is rich, yet more healthful than its flour-filled counterparts. Topped with a fresh berry compote, this flourless cake is a very tasty, not-too-guilty pleasure. Enjoy in moderation.

Ingredients

6 ounces dark chocolate, at least 70%
3 ounces butter
3 ounces almond butter
3 eggs, separated
6 tablespoons natural cane sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

FRESH BERRY COMPOTE

1 cup frozen raspberries, defrosted
2 tablespoons pure cane sugar
1/4 cup water
3 cups fresh berries - blueberries, raspberries,
blackberries

Directions

1. Over a double boiler, melt chocolate, butter and almond butter. Let cool.
2. Separate the egg and place the yolks in the bowl of an electric mixer. Add 3 Tbs sugar and beat until a light, pale yellow color, about 6 minutes. Slowly pour in the melted chocolate and mix until combined.
3. In a clean mixing bowl, add the eggs whites. Whisk until frothy. Slowly pour in 3 Tbs sugar and mix until soft peaks form. Fold the whites into the chocolate/egg mixture. Carefully fold until combined.
4. Spray 4 oz ramekin or muffin cups with pan spray. Pour the batter into the molds, almost to the top. Bake at 325 degrees for 12 minutes. Let cool before unmolding.
5. To serve: reheat at 300 degrees for 4 minutes. Spoon the fruit compote on top.

Serves 4



Cocoa-Banana Frozen Dessert

The flavors in this simple dessert remind us of beach fare – frozen bananas on a stick coated with chocolate. This is a healthier version that you can whip up in no time. It contains no added sugar or dairy and is very versatile. Improve by adding different flavors. Make this a few hours before you plan to serve – it's best when just frozen. Any leftovers will keep for a couple of weeks in the freezer.

Ingredients

4 very ripe bananas
2 tablespoons pure unsweetened cocoa powder
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
2 tablespoons real maple syrup

Directions

1. Peel the bananas and place in a blender or food processor along with the cocoa powder.
2. Add the vanilla extract and the maple syrup.
3. Blend till very smooth. Pour into individual custard cups or small bowls and freeze until just frozen.

Serves 6



Dark Chocolate Date and Nut Truffles

This recipe is a slam-dunk no matter what your skill level. Even nonbakers will have success. We first tasted these creations in San Francisco at the 2011 Arizona Center For Integrative Medicine's Nutrition & Health Conference. Since this conference, it has become a perennial favorite. Thanks to Rebecca Katz for the recipe! It is great for company since it makes so many truffles.

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup finely diced dried apricots or dried cranberries
- 2 ounces dark chocolate with a 64 to 72 percent cacao content, finely chopped
- 1/3 cup plus 2 tablespoons raw almonds
- 1 cup pitted and halved Medjool dates
- 1 1/2 teaspoons orange zest, or 1/2 teaspoon orange oil (not orange extract)
- 1/8 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 cup unsweetened shredded coconut

Directions

1. Soak the apricots or cranberries in cold water for 5 minutes.
2. Place the chopped chocolate in a small bowl and stir in 2 tablespoons of boiling water. Let stand for 30 seconds. Using a small whisk, stir until the chocolate is completely melted and glossy.
3. Coarsely grind the almonds in a food processor, then add the dates, orange zest or oil, salt, and the chocolate and process until smooth, about 1 minute.
4. Transfer to a bowl; drain the apricots or cranberries well and stir them into the chocolate mixture. Cover and chill for approximately 2 hours, until firm,
5. Scatter the coconut on a large plate. Scoop up 1 tablespoon of the chocolate mixture and into a smooth ball between your palms, then roll into the coconut to coat. Repeat with the remaining mixture. Place all the



truffles into an airtight container and chill thoroughly before serving. They will keep in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

Makes 20 Truffles



Chocolate Banana Tart

Finding interesting regional products like mesquite flour and integrating them into novel dishes such as this banana tart is one of the most rewarding parts of my work. Mesquite flour is made from the flat, dried pods of the mesquite tree – the whole pods are ground to create a dark, rich flour that is subtly sweet, with fruity overtones. Mesquite flour is combined here with spelt flour to make round pastry disks, which are frosted with chocolate ganache, then topped with bananas, Brazil nuts, and a dollop of whipped cream. If you don't have mesquite and spelt flours, substitute whole wheat pastry flour for the mesquite and whole wheat flour for the spelt. Bananas are rich in potassium – one banana contains 450 mg, one-fifth of the adult daily requirement – and offer a fair share of magnesium (33 mg), too.

Ingredients

3/4 cup spelt flour
1/3 cup mesquite flour
1/2 cup old-fashioned rolled oats
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/3 cup (5 1/3 tablespoons) unsalted, butter,
cubed and softened
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons evaporated cane
sugar
1 1/2 teaspoons agave nectar
3 large eggs
1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 tablespoons finely chopped plus 1/4 cup
chopped raw Brazil nuts
3 bananas, thinly sliced

GANACHE

3/4 cup heavy cream
2 ounces 70% organic dark chocolate, broken
up into small pieces

Directions For The Tart

1. Preheat the oven to 300 degrees F. Line two baking sheets with silicone baking mats or parchment paper.



2. Stir the flours, oats, baking soda, baking powder, and salt together in a bowl.
3. In a standing mixer, combine the butter and 1/2 cup of the sugar. Cream the mixture until light in color and smooth, about 4 minutes. Add the agave and blend.
4. Add the eggs one at a time, blending between each addition.
5. Add the vanilla. On low speed, add the flour mixture and mix until the batter is the consistency of cookie dough.
6. Using a spatula, fold in the 3 tablespoons finely chopped nuts by hand. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and flatten into a disk. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 2 hours.
7. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface. Using a rolling pin, roll out the dough to a 1/4-inch thickness. Using a 3-inch round cookie cutter, cut out 6 pastry bases. Using a large spatula, place the dough on the prepared baking sheets and bake until golden brown, about 8 minutes. Transfer the pastry rounds to a wire rack to cool.

Directions For Ganache & Banana-Nut Topping

1. To make the ganache, bring 1/4 cup of the cream to a boil in a saucepan. Remove from the heat. Add the chocolate to the cream and let sit for 3 to 5 minutes so the chocolate melts. Whisk together until smooth. Set aside.
2. Preheat the oven to broil.
3. To assemble the tarts, place the pastry rounds back on the baking sheets and divide the ganache among the pastry rounds, using an offset spatula or dinner knife to spread the ganache in the pinwheel pattern. Sprinkle the remaining 2 tablespoons sugar over the bananas and put the tarts under the broiler for 30 seconds to brown the tops. Watch them carefully so they don't burn.
4. Whip the remaining 1/2 cup cream to soft peaks, and add a spoonful to each tart.



Garnish with the 1/4 cups chopped nuts before serving.

5. Bring heavy cream to simmer. Pour over chocolate & mix with a spoon to melt chocolate. Allow to cool.
6. Cut three bananas into thin slices. Spread ganache over cookies & top with banana slices. Sprinkle with raw sugar & caramelize with a blow torch. Sprinkle with nuts and top with fresh whipped cream if desired.

Serves 6



Ridiculously Good Triple Chocolate Brownies

These brownies are really fudgy. They have no gluten and are made with olive oil instead of butter, although you would never know it by tasting them. High-quality chocolate is a must here; use only dark, with a 68 to 72 percent cacao content. (Note that cacao content is the amount of pure cocoa bean in a chocolate product; the higher the percentage, the more chocolate, which also means more antioxidants and less sugar.) The finishing pinch of fleur de sel takes these brownies over the top.

Ingredients

2/3 cup almond flour
2 tbsp natural unsweetened cocoa powder
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp baking soda
1/8 tsp sea salt
8 oz chopped dark chocolate
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 large eggs
2/3 cup evaporated cane sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract
2 tbsp cocoa nibs
Pinch fleur de sel or fine sea salt

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and lightly oil an 8-by-8-inch baking pan.
2. Put the almond flour, cocoa powder, cinnamon, baking soda, and salt in a bowl and stir to combine.
3. Put half of the chocolate in a heatproof bowl and set the bowl over a saucepan of simmering water. Heat, stirring often, just until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Remove from the heat and whisk in the olive oil.
4. Crack the eggs into a large bowl and whisk until frothy. Slowly add the sugar, whisking all the while, and continue whisking until the mixture is smooth. Add the vanilla extract, then gradually add the chocolate,



continue whisking until smooth and glossy.

5. Add the flour mixture and stir until just combined. Stir in the remaining chocolate and the cocoa nibs. Scrape the mixture into the prepared pan and smooth the top with a spatula.
6. Bake for 15 minutes, then sprinkle with a pinch of fleur de sel. Continue to bake for another 10 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Let cool to room temperature in the pan before cutting. Brownies that don't get eaten right away can be stored in the freezer in a zip-top bag for up to a month.

Makes 16 Brownies

