

DARK CHOCOLATE CRANBERRY CUPCAKES, WITH SUGARED CRANBERRIES

INGREDIENTS

for the cupcakes

4 1/2 ounces high-quality bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
9 tablespoons (1 stick plus 1 tablespoon) unsalted butter, room temperature
1 cup confectioners' sugar
6 large eggs, separated, at room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 cup all-purpose flour

for the frosting

1 cup unsalted butter (2 sticks), Softened to room temperature
3 1/2 cups confectioners (powdered) sugar
1/2 cup cocoa powder
1/2 teaspoon table salt
2 teaspoons vanilla extract or 1 teaspoon almond extract
4 tablespoons milk or heavy cream

For the filling and decoration

1 cup whole berry cranberry sauce (homemade or store bought)
1 cup sugared cranberries

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 400F. Prepare a muffin pan with liners.

In the top part of a double boiler over very hot, but not simmering, water, or in a microwave at medium power, melt the chocolate. Remove from the heat or the oven, and let stand, stirring often, until cool.

Beat the butter in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle blade on medium-high speed until smooth, about 1 minute. On low speed, beat in the confectioners' sugar. Return the speed to medium-high and beat until light in color and texture, about 2 minutes. Beat in the egg yolks, one at a time, scraping down the sides of the bowl. Beat in the chocolate and vanilla.

Beat the egg whites and granulated sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer on high speed just until they form soft, shiny peaks. Do not overbeat. Stir about one fourth of the beaten whites into the chocolate mixture to lighten it, then fold in the remaining whites, leaving a few visible wisps of whites. Sift half of the flour over the chocolate mixture, and fold in with a rubber spatula. Repeat with the remaining flour.

Fill the lined muffin cups three-quarters full, being careful not to overfill. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center of the cupcake comes out clean, about 20-22 minutes. Cool the cupcakes in the pan for 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

For the frosting, cream butter for a few minutes in a mixer with the paddle attachment on medium speed. Turn off the mixer. Sift 3 cups powdered sugar and cocoa into the mixing bowl. Turn your mixer on the lowest speed until the sugar and cocoa are absorbed by the butter. Increase mixer speed to medium and add vanilla extract, salt, and milk/cream and beat for 3 minutes. If your frosting needs a more stiff consistency, add a little more sugar. If your frosting needs to be thinned out, add additional milk 1 tablespoon at a time.

To assemble the cupcakes, use the cone method to make a well in the center of each cupcake. Cut the top off each cone and discard the insides. Fill each well with about 1 1/2 tablespoons of cranberry sauce and replace the cupcake disk.

Pipe frosting onto the filled cupcakes and decorate a few of your sugared cranberries to garnish. Refrigerate until ready to serve.