

STARS & STRIPES CAKE FOR THE 4TH OF JULY

INGREDIENTS

for the Red Velvet Hearts

2 1/2 cups sifted cake flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons cocoa powder (unsweetened)
2 ounces red gel food coloring
1/2 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 1/2 cups sugar
2 eggs, at room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup buttermilk, at room temperature
1 teaspoon white vinegar
1 teaspoon baking soda

for the Vanilla Pound Cake

1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
3/4 teaspoons table salt
1 cup granulated sugar
1 1/2 sticks unsalted butter, softened but slightly cool, cut into 12 pieces
3 large eggs
3/4 cups milk
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

for the frosting

8 ounces (1 package) cream cheese, softened to room temperature
1 stick unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
3 cups confectioners sugar
2 cups sliced almonds
You can also use raspberries, strawberries and/or blueberries to decorate

You will also need: a 4x4x9 inch Pullman Loaf pan and a 2 1/2 inch star-shaped cookie cutter.

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350F. Prepare a foil sling for your 13 x 9 baking pan and spray liberally with baking spray.

Sift together the cake flour, baking powder, and salt into a medium bowl; set aside. In a small bowl, mix food coloring and cocoa powder to form a thin paste without lumps; set aside.

In the mixing bowl of your stand mixer, beat butter and sugar together until light and fluffy, about 3-4 minutes. Beat in eggs, one at a time, then beat in vanilla and the red cocoa paste, scraping down the bowl with a spatula as you go. Add one third of the flour mixture to the butter mixture, beat well, then beat in half of the buttermilk. Beat in another third of flour mixture, then second half of buttermilk. End with the last third of the flour mixture, beat until well combined, making sure to scrape down the bowl with a spatula. Note: if you have never made red velvet cake, the color is shockingly red... it's supposed to be that way, obviously.

In a small bowl, mix vinegar and baking soda. Yes, it will fizz! Add it to the cake batter and stir well to combine. Pour into prepared pan and for 38-40 minutes. Cool the cakes in the pan for 1 hour, then release remove with foil sling and transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

Towards the end of the cooling, make your vanilla batter. In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar on low speed. Add the butter, 1 piece at a time, and combine until the mixture resembles coarse sand. Add the eggs, 1 at time, and mix until fully combined. Add the milk and vanilla, increase the speed to medium, and mix until the batter is light, fluffy and free of lumps.

Reheat oven to 350F. Liberally spray your Pullman Loaf pan with baking spray (except the lid; spray that just before you cover).

To make your heart-center, Even out the top of your red velvet sheet cake. Then, using your cookie cutter, cut out as many hearts as you can (I came up with 10 or so). Stack as many as you can flush together, so you have a long row of flowers — essentially one piece, 7 inches long. Put one inch of the vanilla batter in the bottom of the pan, and then insert your “flower core”. Holding them in place as best you can, fill the pan round the flower to just covering them (3/4 full). Put in the pull loaf lid.

Bake for 50 minutes or until a skewer inserted through comes out clean (of course you have to take it out and remove the lid to do this, but 50 minutes was perfect for me). cool in the pan for 15 minutes before inverting to a wire rack to cool completely.

While the cake is cooling, make your frosting. Cream the cream cheese, butter, and vanilla in the bowl of your stand mixer. Add the sugar and beat until smooth. Decorate as desired and then sprinkle sliced almonds to the side of the cake (I do this to hide my frosting imperfections!)