

APRIL SHOWERS BRING MAY FLOWERS CUPCAKES
(CHOCOLATE CUPCAKES WITH COCONUT PECAN FROSTING AND FLOWER-SHAPED SUGAR COOKIES)

INGREDIENTS

for the cookies

1 cup butter, softened
1 cup white sugar
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 tablespoons orange juice
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup confectioners sugar
3 tablespoons lemon juice
various colored sugar sprinkles

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 sugar
1 can evaporated milk
1/2 cup unsalted butter
3 large egg yolks
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 1/3 cups flaked coconut
1 1/2 cup chopped pecans

You will also need: flower shaped cookie cutters, long tooth picks or bamboo skewers, cupcake wrappers and "pots" (I used metal "buckets")

DIRECTIONS

First make your cookies as these can be made a few days ahead of time. In mixing bowl, cream together unsalted butter, sugar and egg until light and fluffy. Beat in flour, baking powder, salt, orange juice and vanilla until smooth and well combined. Chill in refrigerator 2-3 hours or until firm enough to be rolled.

Preheat oven to 400F. Roll out half of the dough on a well floured surface to 1/4 inch thickness (be careful to get the surface even, otherwise you will have oddly-browned cookies. Also, do not roll the dough too thin, otherwise you will have hard cookies when they come out of the oven).

Cut with carrot-shaped cookie cutters. Place on cookie sheet lined with silpat or onto parchment paper and carefully slide a toothpick in the end, so that an inch or two sticks out the bottom. Bake 8-10 minutes or until golden brown at the edges. Cool completely on a wire rack.

To decorate, whisk together lemon juice and confectioners sugar in a small bowl. Using a food safe paint brush, brush the tops of the carrots with the sugar "glue" and then sprinkle with green sugar sprinkles. Repeat the gluing with orange for the remainder of the carrots. Let harden before placing in an airtight container for storage (up for 1 week).

For the cupcakes, 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, in a medium saucepan, combine the sugar, milk, butter, egg yolks, and vanilla. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until thickened, about 10 minutes. Stir in coconut and pecans. Transfer to a bowl and, stirring occasionally, allow to cool to room temperature before frosting the cake. When the cupcakes are cool, frost them generously. Stick a carrot cookie in the top as decoration