CLASSIC

Chocolate Cake

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COOKING

Hit Me with Your Best Choc

Pastry guru Emily Luchetti shares her classic chocolate cake recipe

BY KAREN PALMER
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"You can have your molten lava cake; you can have your chocolate soufflé; just give me a classic, really, really delicious, moist, loaded-with-frosting chocolate layer cake, and that's all I need."

Coming from a pastry guru like Emily Luchetti, that's saying something. In her 28-year career, Luchetti has worked at some of the most glitzy San Francisco restaurants (Farallon, Waterbar)—and she's now the chief pastry officer at the uber-popular Marlowe, Park Tavern and The Cavalier.

Luchetti's classic chocolate cake ([see the recipe](#)) is all of the good things she mentions above and more. It's easy to make. It has the perfect frosting-to-cake ratio. It's impressive in its old-school simplicity. And, like she says, it "turns every dinner into an occasion—because it's cake!"

The recipe is a family hybrid: It combines Luchetti's grandmother's frosting (which she used to call "Grammy's chocolate frosting") with her husband's grandmother's cake recipe. Over the past 20 years or so, she's evolved it, making the frosting more velvety and the cake a touch sweeter, but, "It's at the point where I'm not messing with it anymore," she laughs.

We wouldn't touch a thing either. Unlike recipes that simply use a cocoa powder paste, Luchetti's version folds in melted chocolate for extra oomph. Luchetti's tip: Sift the dry ingredients to achieve an ultra-fluffy batter.
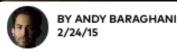
The swirls of rich, thick frosting start with a ganache base; make sure you put the sugar into the hot cream so it dissolves and you don't get any graininess. The cake should be completely cool before you frost, and although she definitely recommends using an offset spatula, Luchetti doesn't want you to fuss. "The beauty of a layer cake is that it doesn't have to be perfect. Its rusticness is what makes it beautiful," she says. "I'm an 'a lot of frosting' person—just make sure you leave enough for the top when you frost the middle."

We'll confidently state that this is the best darn chocolate cake we've ever had. Luchetti herself says, "Taking the first bite, I feel like there's nothing else going on in the world—and that's what a good dessert should be."

Agreed. Now may we have another slice?

Chocolate Layer Cake

The "throwback" dessert that always calls for a celebration

BY ANDY BARAGHANI
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Emily Luchetti, two-time James Beard Award-winning pastry chef and cookbook author, shares this chocolate layer cake that wins our approval by having the perfect ratio of cake to frosting. Remember to invert the cake immediately after it comes out of the oven so that it doesn't continue to bake from the residual heat from the baking dish.

Chocolate Layer Cake

Recipe adapted from Emily Luchetti, Marlowe, Park Tavern and The Cavalier, San Francisco,

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

Prep Time: 50 minutes, plus chilling time
Cook Time: 40 minutes
Total Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes, plus chilling time

INGREDIENTS

For the Chocolate Cake:

Unsalted butter, for greasing

¾ cup cocoa powder, plus more for dusting

¾ cup water

4 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped or broken into 1-inch pieces

2 cups all-purpose flour, divided

1½ teaspoons baking soda

¼ teaspoon kosher salt

12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened

2 cups granulated sugar

DIRECTIONS

1. Make the chocolate cake: Preheat the oven to 350°. Grease the bottoms and sides of two 9-inch cake pans with butter and dust evenly with cocoa powder, tapping out the excess.

2. In a small bowl, stir the cocoa powder with the water to make a paste; set aside.

3. In a small heatproof bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water, making sure the bowl does not touch the water, melt the chocolate. Using a rubber spatula, stir the chocolate until smooth and evenly melted, 2 to 3 minutes. Set aside and allow to cool to room temperature.

5 large eggs

1 cup whole milk, divided

For the Chocolate Frosting:

10 ounces bittersweet chocolate, roughly chopped

1 cup heavy cream

⅔ cup granulated sugar

12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened and cut into 1-inch pieces

4. Through a fine-mesh strainer over a large bowl, sift the flour and baking soda; add the salt.

5. In a stand mixer, beat the butter and sugar on medium speed until smooth. Scrape down the sides of the bowl using a spatula and stir in the eggs, 1 at a time, until combined. On low speed, add the reserved cocoa paste and melted chocolate and mix until well combined.

6. Still on low speed, add half of the sifted flour, then half the milk. Repeat with the remaining flour and then the milk, until combined.

7. Divide the batter between the greased and coated pans. Using an offset spatula or rubber spatula, spread out the batter. Bake the cakes on the middle rack of the oven until a toothpick inserted into the middle comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Run a paring knife around the inside edges to loosen the cake. Place a plate or sheet pan on top of each cake and invert the cake. Remove the pans and allow the cakes to cool completely.

8. Make the chocolate frosting: Place the chopped chocolate in a medium bowl.

9. In a small saucepan over medium heat, warm the cream and sugar, stirring often until the sugar dissolves, 2 to 3 minutes.

10. Pour the warm cream over the chopped chocolate and let sit for 2 to 3 minutes or until the chocolate begins to soften. Whisk until smooth and allow to sit for another 5 to 7 minutes to cool slightly.

11. Whisk the butter into the chocolate, adding only 1 or 2 pieces at a time and whisking until they're blended in before adding the next.

12. Let the frosting sit at room temperature until it seems spreadable, 20 to 30 minutes.

13. To assemble the cake, place one of the cake layers bottom-side up on a cake plate or platter. Using an offset metal spatula, ice with about 1 cup of the frosting. Place the second layer, also bottom-side up, on top of the frosting. Spread the remaining frosting over the side and top of the cake. Slice and serve.