

Mocha-Walnut Torte

This decadent yet simple gluten-free cake can be found in European bistros and coffeehouses. The cake is an excellent keeper and, because it's sturdy, it travels well. It's delicious on its own, but my mom and I enjoyed it with vanilla ice cream. It pairs beautifully with the Lolati Wines 2020 Syrah.



Ingredients

Yields 10-12 servings

- 1 ½ cups walnuts (whole or pieces)
- 1 cup plus 2 tbsp sugar
- 4 oz semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 2 tbsp ground coffee, preferably espresso
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 4 large eggs
- 1 ½ tsp pure vanilla extract
- ½ tsp fine sea salt
- Cocoa powder for dusting
- Whipped cream, crème fraîche, or ice cream for serving (optional)

Procedure

Step 1

Center a rack in the oven and preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Butter a 9- or 9 ½-inch springform pan, or use baker's spray. Line the bottom with parchment paper and butter or spray the parchment, then dust the bottom of the pan with cocoa powder. Place the pan on a baking sheet lined with parchment.

Step 2

Put the nuts, 2 tbsp of the sugar, chocolate, coffee, and cinnamon in a food processor and pulse, scraping the sides and bottom of the bowl often and taking care that you don't process for so long that the walnuts become a paste and the chocolate melts. You want to end up with a bread-crumble-like mixture—it's better to have some discernible morsels than to overdo it. Set aside.

Step 3

Separate the eggs, putting the yolks in a large bowl and the whites in the bowl of a stand mixer, or a large bowl that you can use with a hand mixer. Working with a whisk, beat the egg yolks until they're homogeneous. Gradually whisk in ¾ cup of the sugar and beat for a couple of minutes, until the mixture is pale and your whisk leaves tracks. Beat in the vanilla. Switch to a flexible spatula and stir in the walnut mixture.

Step 4

Add the salt to the egg whites. Attach the bowl to the mixer stand, if using, and fit it with the whisk attachment. Beat the whites until they are foamy, opaque, and just a bit thick. Beat in the remaining ¼ cup sugar, adding a tbsp at a time. Once all the sugar is in, the whites should be thick and glossy—lift the beater(s), and the meringue should hold a pretty peak.

Step 5

Using a flexible spatula, scoop out about a quarter of the meringue and add it to the bowl with the egg yolk mixture. Stir together energetically so that the whites lighten the thick mixture. Scrape the rest of the meringue into the bowl, being gentle, stir and fold it in. Without overdoing it, you want to get as much of the meringue into the nut mixture as quickly as possible. If there are any white streaks, it's fine (better to have streaks than to knock all the air out of the meringue). Scrape the batter into the pan, swiveling the pan from side to side to settle the batter evenly.

Step 6

Bake for 43 to 48 minutes, or until the cake feels firm to the touch and has risen. The rise might be higher around the edges, but the middle should lift too. Check the center with a toothpick and it should come out clean. Transfer pan to a cooling rack and let rest for 5-10 minutes, then run a table knife between the cake and the pan to release the cake; remove the sides of the springform and allow the cake to cook at room temperature on the rack.

Step 7

When the cake is cool, invert it, remove the base of the pan and parchment paper and turn the cake right side up on the rack. The cake is good at room temperature, but it's also delicious cold from the fridge. Serve with whipped cream, crème fraîche, or ice cream.

Storing

Wrapped well, the cake will keep for about a week in the refrigerator or for up to 2 months in the freezer; thaw in the wrapper.