

Pumpkin spice party

Story and photo by Auriana Cook



Cupcakes

1 2/3 cups flour
2 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp cinnamon
1/4 tsp nutmeg
1/8 tsp cloves

3/4 cup unsalted butter

1 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 cup canned pumpkin puree
2 eggs

Frosting

1 8 oz package cream cheese
1/2 cup unsalted butter
4 cups confectioner's sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract

October means cozy sweaters, falling leaves ... and pumpkin spice everything! It's hard to ignore the insanity of pumpkin spice season. Facebook is flooded with recipes, and the smell of pumpkin spice lattes wafts from every corner.

This year, ditch your daily Starbucks and get your pumpkin spice fix at home by baking some delicious cupcakes. I found this recipe from sprinklesomesugar.com on Pinterest.

I'm a big believer in consolidating ingredients. As I stood on the spice aisle on the verge of buying cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg, I was thrilled to find a container labeled "pumpkin pie spice." This mixture contains cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger. The ginger does only enhance the flavor, so I bought this instead of the three separate spices. I was off on the right foot.

That evening, I started baking. I preheated the oven to 350 degrees, mixed the dry ingredients in one bowl, the wet ingredients in another. The pumpkin puree seemed only slightly more appetizing than the stringy pumpkin guts I'm familiar with scooping out of jack-o'-lanterns, but once I added the sugar and spices, it smelled amazing.

When all the ingredients were mixed, I lined my trays with cupcake papers. I used an ice cream scoop to dollop batter into each paper, filling them about 3/4 of the way. Then I popped them into the oven for 20 minutes.

While these were baking, I made the frosting. This involved blending butter, cream cheese and vanilla with an electric mixer, while slowly adding confectioner's sugar. Personally I don't think cream cheese frosting should be sickeningly sweet, and four cups of sugar seemed like a lot. I stopped at three and it tasted fine, but it depends on the person.

What I thought would be the fun part proved to be really difficult: frosting the cupcakes with a decorating bag. This is what bakers use to make picturesque swirls of frosting. My first dozen came out

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with wobbly squiggles rather than perfect swirls. Even after I got the hang of it, I wondered if the cupcake in the Pinterest photo had been frosted by God's hand and not a mere mortal like me. I might stick to using a knife in the future.

The last touch was to sprinkle a bit of pumpkin pie spice on each cupcake. This looked pretty and camouflaged my mediocre frosting job. But their appearance is beside the point; they turned out really, really good. I brought trays to my family, friends, and a room full of hungry journalists to keep from eating them all myself. I recommend this recipe for every party, potluck, or pumpkin-craving from now until Thanksgiving!