



GOOEY GOODIES. Chocolate Peppermint Cookies are baked and wrapped in New York. The main ingredient is one-and-a-half pounds of chocolate, which guarantees an intensely chocolate-y flavor. The cookie's base is made of a combination of unsweetened and bittersweet chocolate. (Sara Moulton via AP)

Chocolate Peppermint Cookies are a holiday treat

By Sara Moulton
The Associated Press

If, like me, you're a fan of dark chocolate peppermint bark, you're going to love these cookies. Your friends and family will, too. But you'll have to plan ahead because the batter is so soft it needs to chill overnight before scooping.

The main ingredient is one-and-a-half pounds of chocolate, which guarantees an intensely chocolate-y flavor. The cookie's base is made of a combination of unsweetened and bittersweet chocolate. Afterward, additional chunks of the bittersweet chocolate — along with the crushed mint candy — are folded in.

The key to this recipe's success is good quality bittersweet chocolate — that is, a brand that contains at least 60 percent cacao. The higher the percentage of cacao in a chocolate bar, the darker and more intense the flavor. That's why we're adding chunks of chocolate instead of chocolate chips — bittersweet bar chocolate contains much more cacao than most chips.

Chopping the chocolate will take a little time. I recommend using a serrated knife for the job. As for crushing the peppermint

candies, the best way is to put them in a re-sealable plastic bag and gently whack away at the bag with a rolling pin. The easiest way to portion out the batter is with a one-ounce ice-cream scoop rather than a spoon — and it'll make the size of the cookies more consistent, too; just dip it in hot water between each scoop.

I suggest baking a single tray of cookies at a time because the cookies don't cook evenly when there's more than one tray in the oven. Finally, be careful not to overcook them. The cookies should be soft to the touch when pulled out of the oven. That way they'll remain nice and gooey.

As you might imagine, these cookies are delicious year-round. If you decide to make them during a season when peppermint candies are scarce, just leave them out and add one-and-a-half tablespoons of powdered espresso. You will end up with outstanding mocha cookies.

Editor's note: Sara Moulton is host of public television's "Sara's Weeknight Meals." She was executive chef at Gourmet magazine for nearly 25 years and spent a decade hosting several Food Network shows, including "Cooking Live." Her latest cookbook is Home Cooking 101.

Chocolate Peppermint Cookies

Start to finish: 1 hour and 45 minutes, plus 8 hours chilling time
Servings: Makes about 3 dozen cookies

1 pound bittersweet chocolate
4 ounces unsweetened chocolate
8 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into tablespoons
4 large eggs, at room temperature
1 1/2 cups sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
60 grams (about 1/2 cup) all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon table salt
1 cup (about 5 ounces) hard red-and-white peppermint candies

Coarsely chop one-half of the bittersweet chocolate and all of the unsweetened chocolate. In a medium metal bowl, combine the coarsely chopped chocolates and butter. Set the bowl over a saucepan of barely simmering water, making sure the bottom of the bowl is not touching the water. Melt the mixture, stirring often. Remove from the heat as soon as all of the chocolate is just melted.

Meanwhile, in a medium bowl with electric beaters (or in a stand mixer), beat the eggs and sugar on medium speed until the mixture is very thick and pale, about 10 minutes. Beat in the vanilla. In a small bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt.

Chop the remaining bittersweet chocolate into chocolate-chip size pieces. Chop or crush the peppermint candies into 1/4- to 1/3-inch pieces.

Fold the melted chocolate mixture into the egg mixture using a large rubber spatula. Add the flour mixture and fold it in until it is just incorporated. Add the chip-size bittersweet chocolate and the peppermint pieces and stir gently, just until incorporated. Cover and chill the mixture overnight.

Preheat the oven to 350° Fahrenheit. Line three large baking sheets with parchment paper, scoop out the batter into balls about one-and-a-half inches wide (the size of a walnut shell), and arrange them on the baking sheets, leaving an inch of space between them. Working with one sheet pan at a time, bake the cookies on the middle shelf of the oven for nine to 11 minutes, until they are shiny on top and set around the edges but still soft to the touch on top. Let them sit on the sheet pans for five minutes then transfer them to a rack to cool completely.

Nutrition information per serving: 164 calories (90 calories from fat); 10 g fat (6 g saturated, 0 g trans fats); 31 mg cholesterol; 32 mg sodium; 20 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 14 g sugar; 3 g protein.

A berry tart in under an hour, using an olive-oil cake base

By Melissa d'Arabian
The Associated Press

During the holidays, we could all use a fantastic tart recipe in our hip pockets. Tarts are a perfect festive end to any dinner party, and they make a lovely gift for a neighbor. If the thought of making homemade crust intimidates you, or if you just prefer not to take in so many fat calories densely packed into a sheet of pastry, stick with me.

The tart I'm talking about today uses a simple olive-oil cake as the base, which is then topped with fresh berries. I took inspiration from a fruit-topped sponge cake and turned the idea into a recipe that could be made start-to-finish in about an hour, with much of that time spent baking or cooling. I whipped up a speedy orange olive-oil cake (technically speaking, it's a quick bread, but that's our secret!) and made that the base, which works well with either regular flour or most gluten-free flours I have tried.

I used a pie pan with a raised center, a worthy minimal investment if you do any amount of baking. Buy one and you'll find a thousand uses for it. But if you don't have the special pie mold, use a regular tart or pie pan, and your results will be equally delicious. To create the pretty filling, I tossed a couple of cups of berries in a little



ELEGANT & EASY. Tarts are a perfect festive end to any dinner party, and they make a lovely gift for a neighbor. This Orange and Raspberry Tart uses a simple olive-oil cake as the base, which is then topped with fresh berries. (Melissa d'Arabian via AP)

orange marmalade thinned with hot water. Place the syrupy berries on the cake — maybe take an extra minute or two to arrange them nicely for a bakery-made look — and sprinkle on some powdered sugar to serve.

The cake itself has a mere 1/3 cup of sugar in the recipe, letting the raspberry topping offer most of the sweetness. The result is a gorgeous dessert or afternoon tea accompaniment that feels more indulgent than it actually is.

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the cookbook, Supermarket Healthy.

Orange and Raspberry Tart

Servings: 8

Start to finish: 1 hour, including baking and cooling time

Base:

1 cup all-purpose flour
3/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
Pinch cinnamon
1 egg
1/3 cup granulated sugar
1/3 cup olive oil
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
Zest of one orange, about 2 teaspoons
Juice of one orange, plus enough water to make 1/3 cup

Topping:

About 2 cups fresh raspberries, or other berries or sliced fruit
2 tablespoons orange marmalade
2 tablespoons boiling water
Powdered sugar for dusting (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350° Fahrenheit.

In a medium bowl, sift the flour, baking powder and soda, salt, and cinnamon. Whisk dry ingredients together and set aside. In another medium bowl, whisk together the egg and sugar vigorously until mixture is pale yellow, about one minute. Whisk in the oil, extract, zest, and juice mixture and mix until well-blended. Scrape the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients with a rubber spatula and stir gently until combined, but do not overmix.

Line the bottom of an eight-inch pie pan with raised center with parchment paper (cut round to fit), and spray liberally with nonstick spray. (If raised center pie pan is unavailable, use a regular eight-inch tart or pie pan.) Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake until the center springs back when gently pressed, about 25 to 30 minutes. Let the cake to cool for 15 minutes before gently unmolding and chilling it in the freezer for 15 minutes to cool completely. (Or, allow cake to cool at room temperature for another 30 minutes.) Meanwhile, place the orange marmalade and boiling water into a medium bowl and whisk until jam is loosened. Add the berries and stir to coat. Add an extra tablespoon of water if mixture is dry. Flip the cake over so the concave side is up. Use a toothpick, skewer, or fork to poke holes into the bottom of the cake. Spoon the raspberry mixture onto the cake and arrange the berries so they are pretty. Just before serving, garnish with a dusting of powdered sugar, if desired.

Nutrition information per serving: 215 calories (88 calories from fat); 10 g fat (1 g saturated, 0 g trans fats); 27 mg cholesterol; 163 mg sodium; 29 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 14 g sugar; 3 g protein.

The staff at The Asian Reporter wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday!