

Chocolate Cupcakes with Peanut Butter Buttercream Frosting

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2-1/3 cups of all purpose flour
1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa (like Hershey's)
3 teaspoons of baking powder
1/2 teaspoon of kosher salt
1-1/2 cups of granulated sugar
1 (3.9 ounce) package of instant chocolate pudding
1/2 cup butter, softened at room temperature and cubed
1/2 cup milk
1 cup sour cream
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the frosting:

1/3 cup butter at room temperature
1/3 cup of vegetable shortening (like Crisco)
1 cup of peanut butter
1 pound of powdered sugar (about 4 cup)
Pinch of kosher salt
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
4 to 6 tablespoons milk

Garnish: Chopped peanuts and chocolate sprinkles, optional

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Line 24 cupcake cups with paper liners. In a mixing bowl, using the paddle attachment, add the first 6 ingredients and mix for 2 minutes on low. Add the cubed butter a few pieces at a time and mix another 2 minutes on low until mixture is sandy looking. Add the milk and sour cream, mix for 1 minute on low; add the eggs, one at a time, until fully incorporated, then add the vanilla. Mix on low speed for another minute. Do not over-beat. Scrape up any batter from the bottom of the bowl and incorporate into the mixture.

Use a large ice cream scoop to fill paper cups about 2/3rds full. Bake at 350 degrees F for about 20 to 25 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted comes back clean. Place pans on a rack and allow to cool for at least 30 minutes.

For the frosting, cream together the butter and shortening, then add the peanut butter. On medium speed, add the powdered sugar about 1/2 cup at a time. Mixture will be stiff. Add in the vanilla and then the milk, one tablespoon at a time while beating on medium, until frosting is fluffy and reaches the desired consistency. You may not need all of the milk.

Once completely cooled, spread or pipe frosting on top of the cupcakes and garnish immediately with chopped peanuts and/or sprinkles, if desired, before frosting sets. Serve immediately, store in a cool area, or refrigerate.

Cook's Notes: I piped the cupcakes above using a Wilton 1M star tip. For garnish, I used finely chopped honey roasted peanuts and chocolate sprinkles. Keep in a cool place or refrigerate if not serving right away, but let the cupcakes come to room temperature, uncovered, before serving. Both heat and condensation may cause frosting to slide off, especially when piped on.

Variations: Pour batter into 9 x 13 inch baking pan that has been buttered and floured. Bake in a preheated 350 degree F oven, for about 25 to 30 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes back clean. For a richer chocolate flavor, add in 1 to 2 tablespoons of cocoa. For a special treat, press one unwrapped, mini peanut butter cup into the center of each cupcake liner.

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