




CHAPTER 09-12

CHOCOLATE CAKE



MASTERCLASS

CHOCOLATE CAKE



“This cake takes days of prep time and a lot of work to make, but it makes for a beautiful cake and a delicious one that will wow your friends.”

Chef Dominique’s whimsical chocolate cake is a wonder to behold—and will make a fantastic cake to use as a showstopper at your next dinner party. But like most things in life that are worth doing, it takes a lot of time to prepare. Made of thin layers of delicate spongecake and silky smooth chocolate mousse, all enrobed in a slate-black chocolate mirror glaze, this is a French-style cake, with a mousse base and thin slices of cake (as opposed to denser American-style cakes with buttercream frosting). This cake is full of different textures; it’s intricate and very delicate. It’s just the type of cake that Chef Dominique grew up with and now wants to share with you.

Biscuit (pronounced “bis-KWEE”) is the French word for “cake.” It is easier to prepare than American cakes,

as it uses fewer ingredients, and is baked in a sheet pan in one large layer, as opposed to two or three separate round pans. And because of this large canvas, the cake can then be cut into virtually any shape for building your cakes. Once the cake is cooled and unmolded, make sure to cut the cake from the inside of the ring mold, so that the cake will fit evenly inside it once you’re ready to assemble the finished dessert. (Don’t forget to save the scraps! You can toast them in the oven and crumble them over ice cream.)

The chocolate mousse—one of Chef Dominique’s favorite desserts on its own—is best made and used straight away while it is fresh and at the peak of its flavor and texture. The mirror glaze makes the cake so shiny you can actually see your reflection in it.

Once the cake is glazed and set, Chef Dominique covers it with dozens of tiny meringue drops called “Mini Me’s,” which transform the cake into a spiky, fantastical creation. It’s an optional addition, as Chef Dominique notes, but one that adds texture and dimension to an already stunning work of pastry art.

Baking Timeline



CHOCOLATE CAKE BASE: BISCUIT



Makes: 1 kg (enough for a 2-layer 8-inch round cake)

Time: 45 minutes

INGREDIENTS

11 whole eggs, separated into yolks (226g)
and whites (319g)

176g ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup, plus 2 tbsp) granulated sugar

176g ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup, plus 2 tbsp) granulated sugar

102g ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup, plus 2 tbsp) unsweetened
cocoa powder, sifted

Tip: A large egg is generally about 60 g in weight: the white is 30g, yolk is 20g, and shell is 10g. It's always helpful to remember when a recipe calls for eggs in grams.

EQUIPMENT

Stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment

Spatula

Offset spatula

2 sheet pans

Parchment or 2 silicone mats

Non-stick cooking spray

8-inch cake ring

METHOD

Preheat your oven to 400°F (205°C). Line 2 sheet pans with parchment or a silicone mat. Spray the parchment/silicone mats with a thin layer of non-stick cooking spray.

In a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, whip the egg yolks and the first measurement of the sugar (176g) on high speed until light and fluffy (the mixture should be pale and almost white), 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a bowl and set aside. Clean and fully dry the stand mixer bowl.

Make a French meringue: In the stand mixer, whip together the egg whites on medium-high speed until bubbles start to form. While continuing to mix, slowly stream in the second measurement of the sugar (176g) and continue mixing until the meringue is shiny and glossy with medium-stiff peaks. Once you remove the bowl from the mixer, do not let the meringues stand too long or they will clump. Slowly and steadily continue folding them with a rubber spatula to prevent this from happening.

Tip: When making meringue, make sure your bowl is clean and dried thoroughly. Any excess moisture in the bowl may prevent the egg whites from whipping into that fluffy, voluminous texture you're aiming for.

CHOCOLATE CAKE BASE: BISCUIT

Now you'll combine the two mixtures together, but first, you'll need to lighten the denser egg yolk mixture with a little of the light-and-airy meringue (this way, when you fold it all together, the meringue won't totally deflate). First, take $\frac{1}{3}$ of the meringue and fold it into the yolk mixture with a spatula until combined. Carefully fold in the cocoa powder until it's evenly combined. Then gradually add the remaining $\frac{2}{3}$ of the meringue, little by little, gently folding to combine before each addition. Be careful not to overmix, as it'll cause the fluffy texture to deflate and you'll end up with a dense cake.

Pour half of the batter onto the first sheet pan, leveling it out with an offset spatula to within $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of the edge of the mat/pan. Repeat with the rest of the batter on the second sheet pan.

Tip: This cake is known as a biscuit, which is a French-style cake that's thin and a bit dry in texture, so you'll have to add moisture by either soaking it with a syrup soak and/or layering it with mousse to make a layered cake.

Bake both sheet pans for 6 to 8 minutes, or until the middle is fully set.

Tip: Never just rely on a timer, as every oven is different; there are three ways to know if the cake is done:

Jiggle it: the cake should still be a little bouncy in the middle.

Nudge it: press the top gently; it should bounce back.

Stick it: stick a cake tester (or toothpick or paring knife) into the center, and if it comes out clean, you're done!

Tip: People often burn chocolate cakes because it's harder to tell if it's cooked through with the dark color of the batter. So be extra careful and check even before the suggested bake time.

Remove the cake from the oven and let cool in the pan. When cooled, use a paring knife to run along the edges of the cake to loosen it from the sides of the pan. Invert the sheet of cake onto another sheet pan or a countertop lined with parchment. Gently peel off the parchment paper or silicone mat. Using your 8-inch round cake ring as a guide, use a paring knife to cut out two even discs of cake from the inside of the ring. Set aside, covered in plastic wrap until ready to use.

Tip: Cutting the cake from inside the ring, as opposed to the outside, ensures that it will fit perfectly in the cake ring when it comes time to assemble the finished cake. Also, don't discard the cake scraps! They're always a pastry chef's favorite. Break them into small pieces to sprinkle on top of ice cream, or enjoy by the handful as is.

Best enjoyed fresh the day-of. The cake can also be made in advance. In the fridge: cover in plastic wrap and keep chilled for up to 3 days. In the freezer: cover in plastic wrap and store in an airtight container in the freezer for no more than 2 to 3 weeks. To defrost, keep it in the plastic wrap and place in the fridge for 2 to 3 hours until it is moist and soft again. Always defrost in the fridge to keep bacteria from developing, and keep it wrapped so that condensation forms outside the plastic wrap.