**Chocolate Celebration Cake**

From *Baking Kids Love*, by Sur la Table and Cindy Mushet, 2009

***Because it doesn’t have frosting on the sides, you get to see the pretty cake layers. There is lots of cool stuff you can use to decorate the cake. Look for colorful candies, sprinkles, confetti candy, or chunky sugar in the baking aisle.***

INGREDIENTS

For the cake:

1 cup water

¾ cup buttermilk

¾ cup canola or corn oil

3 large eggs

2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

1 ¾ cups sugar

¾ cup unsweetened natural cocoa powder

2 teaspoons baking soda

¼ teaspoon salt

For the frosting:

12 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature

6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

3 cups powdered sugar

2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Tools

Measuring cups and spoons

2 (9-inch) cake pans

Parchment paper

2 medium and 2 large bowls

Whisk

Fine-mesh sieve

Silicone spatula

Toothpick

Oven mitts

2 cooling racks

Electric mixer

Small offset spatula

10- to 12-inch flat serving plate or cake stand

9-inch cake cardboard or tart pan bottom

***This cake batter makes 24 great cupcakes. Use an ice cream scoop to fill the lined cups no more than 2/3 full. Bake on 2 racks for 15-20 minutes, until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Cool completely on a rack before frosting them.***

DIRECTIONS

1. **Before you begin**

* Position 1 oven rack in the top 1/3 of the oven and 1 oven rack in the bottom 1/3 of the oven, and preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly butter the cake pans or spray with pan spray. Line the pans with parchment paper by tracing the outline of the cake pan on the paper and cutting out the circle on the traced line.
* If you are making cupcakes, place cupcake liners in the tins.
* If you are using a fancy detailed pan, either spray it with baker’s spray, or grease it with a little vegetable oil or melted butter, and dust it with fine, unseasoned bread crumbs. The crumbs will disappear during baking. Tap out any excess crumbs.

1. **Make the cake batter**

* Put the **water, buttermilk, oil** and **eggs** in 1 medium bowl. Whisk until the eggs have completely blended into the mixture.
* Sift together the **flour, sugar, cocoa powder, baking soda,** and **salt** into 1 of the large bowls. Push through any lumps with your fingers.
* Pour the liquid ingredients into the dry ingredients. Whisk gently at first, and then, as the mixture blends, whisk faster until you have a smooth batter and you don’t see any more dry patches.

1. **Fill the pans and bake the cake layers**

* Using the silicone spatula, scrape the batter into the prepared pans, dividing it as evenly as you can. Put 1 pan in the center of each oven rack. Bake for 30 – 35 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.
* Using the oven mitts, transfer to the cooling racks. If the cakes are rounded on top, place a clean, dry kitchen towel on top of each hot cake and press down firmly with the palm of your hand to level the surface. Let cool completely.

1. **Make the frosting**

* Place the room-temperature **cream cheese** and **butter** in the other large bowl. Using the mixer, beat on medium-low speed for about 2 minutes, or until creamy and smooth. Turn off the mixer. Sift half of the powdered sugar over the top of the cream cheese mixture. Turn on the mixer to medium-low speed and beat until thoroughly mixed. Turn off the mixer again, and scrape down the sides of the bowl with the silicone spatula. Sift in the **remaining sugar** and beat again until the mixture is blended and fluffy. Beat in the **vanilla** extract.

1. **Unmold 1 cake layer**

* Slide the small spatula around the edges of the cake layers to loosen them from the pan. Place the serving plate upside down on top of 1 cake pan. Hold the plate and pan together like a sandwich, then flip them over. The cake will fall out of the pan onto the plate. Lift off the pan and peel off the parchment paper.

1. **Frost and decorate the cake**

* Using the offset spatula, scoop out about **half of the frosting** into a mound on the center of the cake. Then, spread the frosting evenly on top, leaving a ¼-inch-wide border uncovered around the edge. When you put the second layer on top, it will squish the frosting out to the edge.
* Place a cake cardboard on top of the second cake layer, then flip them over together and lift off the pan. Peel off the parchment paper. Gently push the cake off the board and into place atop the frosted layer.
* Scoop the **remaining frosting** onto the top layer and spread evenly to the edges. Decorate the top with **sprinkles or whatever you like**. You can leave the cake at room temperature for a few hours. Otherwise, refrigerate the cake until serving time.