

## Chocolate Indulgence

*Makes one 8 x 2 round cake*

1½ cups   200 g	61% cacao premium dark chocolate, such as Valrhona Extra Bitter
1 large or 2 medium	Whole zucchini (preferably organic), room temperature
4 large   200 g	Eggs, room temperature and separated
3 Tbsp + 2 tsp   40 g	Stevia-based zero calorie sweetener (granulated form)
2 tsp	Pure vanilla extract
3 Tbsp + 1 tsp   20 g	Unsweetened Dutch-processed cocoa powder (the dark European ones such as Droste or Valrhona offer greater chocolate color and deeper flavor)
3 Tbsp + 1½ tsp   30 g	Cornstarch
3 Tbsp	Warm, melted chocolate (from the quantity above), for finishing
½ tsp	Cream of tartar (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease an 8 by 2-inch cake pan with nonstick spray (the one without flour) and place a parchment round in the bottom of the pan to adhere it. Lightly spray the top of the parchment paper and the sides of the pan with nonstick baking spray (the one with flour). You can also grease the pan with butter or shortening instead, then grease the parchment and sides of the pan with butter or shortening, then lightly dust it all over with flour.

Position the oven rack so that the cake pan will be as close to the center of the oven as possible.

In a heatproof bowl, gently melt the chocolate in the microwave, over a double boiler, or in a water bath. Stir until smooth, then set aside; the chocolate should remain fluid and near body temperature only, not hot.

Trim and peel the zucchini. Using the smallest holes of a box or cheese grater, very finely grate the zucchini into a medium bowl. Do not drain it. You should have approximately 1¾ cups of grated zucchini. By weight, which is more accurate, you will want exactly 7 ounces (200 g).

Add the egg yolks to a separate large bowl. Add the stevia and vanilla, then immediately whisk to thoroughly combine.

Add the cocoa to the bowl with the egg yolk mixture and stir to thoroughly combine. Add half the grated zucchini, along with a little of the juice (1 to 2 teaspoons from the bowl) and stir to combine.

Sprinkle the cornstarch over the top and stir to combine. Scrape the melted chocolate (still slightly warm) into the bowl, leaving about 3 tablespoons in the bowl for finishing; set the bowl with the remaining chocolate aside and keep it just warm. You will use this remaining chocolate to spread on top of the warm cake after it has baked.

Add the remaining zucchini to the bowl containing the chocolate mixture and stir to combine.

In a separate clean mixing bowl, add the egg whites and cream of tartar, if using, and beat the egg whites to stiff peaks. Stir a little of the beaten egg whites into the chocolate mixture to lighten it, then gently fold in the remaining egg whites until combined, maintaining as much volume as possible.

Gently scrape the batter into the prepared cake pan. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or just until the center of the cake looks somewhat puffed and springs back slightly when pressed gently with the tip of your finger. A toothpick inserted into the center and near the edges should come out with just a few moist crumbs.

Set the cake on a cooling rack for 10 minutes to cool, then unmold it upside down onto a plate and carefully peel off the parchment paper. Carefully invert the cake again onto a serving plate so that the top side is up. Warm the 3 tablespoons of remaining chocolate and spread it evenly on top of the cake and out to the edges. The cake will settle to be about 1 inch tall. Let cool before serving.

*Bon appétit!*

## Pointers for Success

- I tested this cake with Valrhona 70% Guanaja and then with Valrhona 61% Extra Bitter. Although both chocolates work well, I preferred the flavor using the 61% (but the slight additional sweetness). You can select the dark chocolate that works best for you, but just remember that each chocolate performs a little differently. I always suggest a premium chocolate for best results, flavor, and mouthfeel. The amount of added white sugar is significantly reduced in this recipe, containing only the sugar offered in the chocolate.
- For the stevia-based sweetener, I used the granular (not powdered) form of Truvia. The taste of stevia lends a distinct flavor (and aroma) that can be detected when the cake is just baked. I find these flavors and aromas mellow after 24 hours and blend nicely into the flavor of the cake and no longer detected.
- With the zucchini and eggs at room temperature rather than cold from the refrigerator you'll reduce the possibility of lumping of the chocolate when it's added to the mixture.
- You can also use vanilla paste or scraped vanilla bean seeds in place of the extract. Add a little more vanilla if you prefer.
- When a baking recipe suggests a range of time for the baking time, always set your timer to the lowest amount of time within that range first, then go to the oven 2 to 3 minutes prior to this time to start testing for doneness and to keep an eye on things. A dark metal pan will bake your item faster than a light metal pan.
- The cream of tartar is optional, but it's a guarantee of not overbeating your egg whites which can easily break down when beaten to stiff peaks if beaten too long. I always suggest adding cream of tartar to egg whites that are to be beaten to stiff peaks. The rule of thumb for the amount of cream of tartar is always 1/8 teaspoon for every large (30 g) egg white (the standard weight of egg white from a large egg).
- You'll notice that the 3 tablespoons of chocolate used to coat the top of the cake is melted solid (premium with cocoa butter) chocolate and no longer in temper. The warmth of the cake keeps the chocolate in a fluid state for some time after it has been applied to the top. Because the chocolate isn't tempered, and when it finally does set, it sets somewhat softer than normal, allowing the cake to be sliced more easily. You should not experience too much blooming (the gray splotched cocoa butter that separates from the chocolate when it's not in perfect temper) on this cake once the chocolate has reached its fully set state. However, if you have overheated your chocolate and you find the chocolate topping has an uneven appearance once it has set, just lightly dust the top of the cake with cocoa powder to mask it.
- This cake doesn't need to be served in large slices, so an 8-inch cake can serve several people. I keep this cake at room temperature under a cake dome for several days, without refrigeration, if I feel it's going to be consumed soon. However, the cake stays surprisingly soft even when it's eaten just out of the refrigerator.

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