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Easy spook cake

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SERVES 12 PREP 40 mins plus cooling COOK 50 mins EASY V

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For the chocolate sponge

185ml vegetable oil, plus extra for the tins

250g plain flour

80g cocoa powder

2½ tsp baking powder

1 tsp bicarbonate of soda

325g light brown soft sugar

250ml buttermilk

100ml strong coffee, or espresso, cooled

2 tsp vanilla extract

2 large eggs

For the berry compote

200g frozen mixed berries

2 tbsp caster sugar

For the icing

75g dark chocolate

150g butter, softened

300g icing sugar

2 tbsp cocoa powder

1-2 tbsp milk

For the topping

5-10 mini white meringues

red and black edible food icing pens



1 Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Oil and line the base and sides of two 20cm loose-bottom cake tins.

Combine the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, bicarb, sugar and a good pinch of salt in a large bowl.

2 Whisk the oil, buttermilk, coffee, vanilla and eggs in a jug. Mix the wet ingredients into the dry. Divide the mixture between the tins and bake for 45-50 mins. If you insert a skewer into the centre, it should come out clean. If not, return to the oven for 5 mins, then check again. Transfer to a wire rack to cool.

3 To make the berry compote, stir the berries and sugar together in a microwavable bowl, and microwave on high for 4 mins, stirring every minute. Sieve the fruit from the syrup and set aside to cool.

4 To make the icing, melt the chocolate in the microwave, stirring every 30 secs. Leave to cool for 5 mins. Cream the butter, icing sugar and cocoa using an electric whisk until fluffy, about 5 mins, before gradually pouring in the melted chocolate – keep beating until smooth. If the icing is stiff, add the milk.

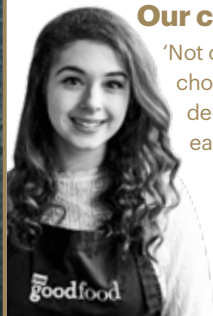
5 Using the icing pens, pipe two eyes and mouths onto the meringues. Leave to set. Put one sponge, base-side up, on a cake stand. Cover with ½ the buttercream, then scatter over the strained berries. Drizzle over ½ the syrup. Place the other sponge on top and spread over the remaining buttercream with a palette knife. Drizzle over the remaining syrup, then arrange the ghost meringues on top.

PER SERVING 664 kcal • fat 31g • saturates 11g • carbs 85g • sugars 67g • fibre 4g • protein 8g • salt 0.8g

Our chef's secret twist

'Not only is this spooktacular chocolate cake delicious but the decoration on it couldn't be easier! I've drawn spooky ghost faces onto shop-bought meringues – a simple trick (and treat) to impress anyone on Halloween.'

Liberty Mendez



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