

COCONUT CAKE WITH SWISS MERINGUE BUTTERCREAM FROSTING ROSETTES

By Judy Kim | Yield: 4-layer (9-inch) cake or approximately 22-24 cupcakes

Coconut cake, probably my favorite cake. I doubled this cake recipe once and half the layers ended up tasting like churros. If I can figure out a way to duplicate that, I'll let you know.

INGREDIENTS

COCONUT CAKE:

½ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature plus extra for greasing pans
2 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for dusting pans
½ teaspoon kosher salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ cup sugar
3 large eggs separated, plus 3 whites
1 ½ cups cream of coconut
1 ¼ cups unsweetened coconut milk (such as So Delicious)
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 teaspoon orange zest
½ cup freshly squeezed orange juice
3 cups unsweetened finely shredded coconut

SWISS MERINGUE BUTTERCREAM FROSTING:

6 large egg whites, at room temperature
1 ½ cups sugar
2 cups confectioner's sugar
1/8 teaspoon kosher salt
1 pound (4 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ cup solid vegetable shortening, at room temperature
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 ½ cups unsweetened finely shredded coconut, tasted
1 ½ cups unsweetened large flaked coconut, toasted for flavor and a rustic look or untoasted for an elegant white cake.

DIRECTIONS

COCONUT CAKE:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Cut 2 rounds of parchment paper to fit the base of each cake pan. Grease two 9-inch cake pans with room temperature butter, place a parchment round in each cake pan and grease the top of the parchment paper. Dust with flour and discard any excess.
3. In a large mixing bowl, using a fork whisk together flour, salt and baking powder. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment cream butter and sugar together until pale in color and fluffy, about 2 to 3 minutes. Add yolks 1 at a time until each is incorporated. Scrape down sides and bottom of bowl with a rubber spatula as needed. Lower speed and add flour mixture in 2 to 3 batches. Batter will be very thick.
4. In a mixing bowl (I prefer a large Pyrex liquid measuring cup since it has a pour spout), whisk together cream of coconut, coconut milk, vanilla, orange zest and orange juice. Add coconut cream mixture and shredded coconut to the batter in 2 to 3 batches. Beat on low until just combined, do not overmix. Transfer to large mixing bowl used previously for flour.
5. In the clean bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whip remaining 6 egg whites until soft peaks form. Gently fold into batter with a large rubber spatula.

6. Divide batter between the prepared cake pans. Smooth batter using an off-set spatula. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes. Test for doneness by inserting a toothpick in the center of the cake, it should come out clean. Cool cake on wire rack. Unmold cakes once they are just cool enough to handle, about 15 to 20 minutes. If the cake is completely cooled it will be difficult to unmold.
7. Using a serrated bread knife, place one hand on top of cake to hold it steady and cut each layer in half horizontally through the center of the cake into two layers. If cake layers are domed during baking, level cake by using the serrated knife. Those are the best parts of the cake to snack on!
8. Cake should be completely cooled for several hours before frosting, or made the day before. If you make the cake in advance wrap each cooled cake tightly with plastic wrap before cutting into layers. Store in refrigerator for 2 to 3 days or freezer.

SWISS MERINGUE BUTTERCREAM FROSTING:

1. In a large metal bowl whisk together sugar and egg whites until fully combined. Set bowl over a pot of boiling water as a double boiler, constantly whisk until the sugar has completely dissolved.
2. Pour mixture in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment and whip on high speed until it is thick, shiny and white. The peaks should be very firm. If they are not firm, the frosting will not be stable.
3. While the egg whites are whipping, sift confectioner's sugar. After you reach stiff peaks, add confectioner's sugar all at once into mixer on very low speed until it is fully incorporated.
4. Add butter and shortening in 2 to 3 additions.
5. Add vanilla extract.
6. Switch to paddle attachment and beat on high speed until smooth, approximately 5 minutes. The longer you beat the frosting, the whiter the color will become.

The buttercream can be stored at room temperature for 4 days, up to 2 weeks in refrigerator, 2 months in the freezer.

CAKE ASSEMBLY AND DECORATIVE ROSETTES:

1. Add 1 small dollop of frosting in the center of a cake stand or plate. Optional to place cake onto a cardboard round available at any baking supply store or online. Place 1 of the 4 layers of cake, cut side up. Cut 5 strips of parchment paper cut 3-inches wide. Fan out each piece of parchment by tucking in the center of the paper under the cake while covering the cake stand. This will ensure easy cleanup of the cake stand after decoration.
2. Spread a thin layer of frosting on top of the first layer of cake using an offset spatula. It's easiest by starting with a large dollop of frosting in the center and spread it out. Push enough frosting to the edge of the cake, it's helpful if the frosting extends past the cake. This helps keep the layers even and aids in frosting the exterior. Sprinkle top with toasted coconut. Place next cake layer on top and repeat with frosting and coconut. Repeat with the third layer and for the final layer place cut side down (I prefer the bottom piece of the cake rounds as they are flat). Optional: For stability place a bamboo skewer into the center of the cake and trim to height of cake, it will be covered with frosting. Spread frosting in a thin layer on top since it will be covered in roses and 1/4-inch thickness of frosting on the sides of cake, otherwise you may run out of frosting while piping the rosettes.
3. Transfer remaining frosting into a large pastry bag fitted with 1M pastry tip. Place a large 18-inch pastry bag in a pint class, fold back the sides and fill frosting using a rubber spatula. Unfold sides upwards and twist to create pressure. Pro-tip: To keep things tidy, use an icing bag tie to keep the bag closed. And while frosting the cake you can rest the pastry bag in the pint glass.
4. Hold the pastry bag in your dominant hand and keep the bag firmly twisted, use your other hand to guide the base near the tip for control. Starting from the center of the rose, press the pastry bag at the top and guide the tip to move in an outward circle until the rose is created. Keep even pressure but as you approach the final edge of the rose, begin to lighten the pressure to create a tapered finish. Optional to make the roses uniform or varied in size.
5. Remove parchment paper from the cake stand and any excess coconut flakes that have fallen during the decorating process.

Pro-tip: When piping a new cake design, I practice frosting techniques on parchment paper. It's easy to scoop up the frosting and re-use it while you're practicing your skills or planning a new design concept.