

Wicked Chocolate Cheesecake



All you need is love, but a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt – so said Charles M Schulz and who would disagree? Since the days of the Aztecs chocolate has been used as a gift and associated with passion and love. They believed that it brought spiritual wisdom and heightened energy and, as such, was traditionally served at weddings in drink form as a nuptial aid! And it wasn't just the Aztecs who saw the association between chocolate and love; the scientific name for the cocoa plant, *Theobroma Cacao*, translated from Greek, means "food of the gods".

Real chocolate has none of the added fat or chemicals that mass produced confectionary does. Although unlikely ever to be listed as a health food it is good for you in many ways! Phenylethylamine, a substance found in quality chocolate is part of a group of chemicals known as endorphins. These are found naturally in the body and when they are released into the bloodstream, the mood is lifted. Heightened phenylethylamine levels in the brain have also been linked to "falling in love" – so dare I say, it's scientifically proven to make you feel delicious?

With St Valentine's Day tomorrow, we had to give a truly wicked, rich and decadent recipe for lovers. Smooth and creamy, we've gone for a wonderful chocolate cheesecake using 70% dark chocolate buttons from Perth based company, Wicked Chocolate. If this is too rich for you, mix with some milk, plain or white buttons.

I've mixed the base with stem ginger biscuits from Scottish based McKenzies. I prefer this to a traditional digestive base as it gives another layer of intense flavour. Serve with cold, sharp tasting mixed berries and you'll have won your Valentine's heart in one smooth spoonful.

Wicked Chocolate Cheesecake

Ingredients:

150g (5 oz) McKenzie's Stem Ginger Biscuits
45g (1 1/2 oz) farmhouse butter
150gms Wicked plain chocolate buttons (or mix with milk and white if you prefer)
340gm tub of full fat soft cheese such as ricotta or mascarpone
2 eggs, separated into yolks and whites
200ml tub crème fraîche
60gms castor sugar
3 leaves gelatine
2 tablespoons milk
Use a 20cm loose bottom tin or for the romantics, two smaller love heart shaped tins

Method:

Base:

Melt the butter over a low heat. While this is happening, place the biscuits in a plastic food bag and bash with a rolling pin to crush them.

When the butter is melted, remove from the heat and stir in the biscuit crumbs. Once this binds, press the mixture into the base of the tin and put into the fridge.

Filling:

Melt the chocolate in a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water. Remove it from the heat and let it cool.

Whisk together the soft cheese, yolks, crème fraîche and sugar until smooth.

Prepare the leaves of gelatine as per instructions on the packet.

While they are dissolving, heat the milk in a small saucepan until simmering. Squeeze the excess water from the gelatine and add it to the milk. Whisk until it has dissolved.

Stir the gelatine and milk along with the cooled chocolate into the cheese mixture, until it is all thoroughly blended. In another bowl whisk the egg whites to the soft-peak stage. Fold a tablespoon of egg white into the cheesecake mixture to loosen it, and then carefully fold in the rest of the egg white.

Next pour the mixture on to the prepared base, cover with clingfilm and chill in the fridge for at least 4 hours (or overnight if you can).

About half an hour before serving, take some frozen mixed berries out of the freezer. Serve the cheesecake with cold berries and dust lightly with cocoa powder or icing sugar