

# Tu B'Shevat Chocolate Dirt Cakes



Do not adjust your computer screens. You are actually seeing a new post from me. I can't believe I actually got my sh\*t together enough to pull off cooking, staging, photographing

and editing a post. It helped that I have been wanting to make this recipe in honor of Tu b'Shevat since I made a larger dirt cake last year for our dear friend, Dave's, birthday Shabbat dinner, which just happened to fall on Tu b'Shevat. At the time I thought to myself, I said, "Self, you HAVE to remember this and do it better and cuter for next year's Tu b'Shevat" and so, here we are!

So what's been going on since I last posted WAY back in July? Welp, the biggest news is that I am currently 6 months pregnant with our 3rd kiddo. Yep, we took the plunge. If you are a loyal Jewhungry reader, you'll remember that I was wrestling with the question of whether or not to get pregnant in a previous post. When we finally came to the decision that, yes, we were going to try for a third, I felt so certain in that decision. That being said, 6 months into the hardest pregnancy I've experienced, I am FREAKING OUT. Ok, I don't know if it's fair to say 'freaking out' in all caps but I am having a lot of misgivings. A lot of, "What was I thinking!?" has been running through my head in the last 5 months. I started getting sick almost immediately and the nausea hasn't stopped, which hasn't helped my doubts. I am like a she-beast. I must be fed every hour on the hour or else I will puke on you. Seriously, you think I over exaggerate but I do not. Just ask my beloved husband or co-workers. It's not pretty.



Nausea aside, I keep thinking to myself that we have a nice little routine down with the girls and why on Earth did we

decide to make a decision that was going to mess that up!? They have such a strong bond, will this new little critter threaten that? Also, dear Gd, these two girls sleep through the night have been since our current youngest was roughly 6 months old. Like, I get sleep and stuff. Why oh why did we f\*ck with that scenario too!? I have enough experience as a mental health professional to know when I'm starting to spiral so I'll stop here. I'm pretty confident you get the drift. That said, I'd be ever so grateful to know if you have more than 2 kids and had the same experiences of doubt. Please, seriously, normalize me!!!

Deeeeeeeep inhale and exhale.



**Cookie crumble ->**  
**Chocolate cake ->**  
**Cookie crumble ->**  
**Chopped peanuts ->**  
**Vanilla frosting ->**  
**Cookie crumble ->**  
**Chocolate pudding ->**

So back to these here chocolate dirt cakes for Tu b'Shevat. In case you're unfamiliar with the holiday, Tu b'Shevat occurs on the 15th of the Jewish month of Shevat so the name of the holiday literally translates to 15th of Shevat. It's also occasionally referred to as the New Year of Trees and is thought to be an agricultural day marking the first day of Spring. I'm sure if you're reading this somewhere like

Minnesota or Massachusetts you're all, "Seriously? Spring in January!?" But remember, we're talking about Biblical Israel here so it's a wee bit warmer there this time of year. Tu b'Shevat technically a minor holiday but it's just so dang fun that we make a point to 'celebrate' it in our household. A lot of commentary exists out there pointing to the fact that humans are "compared to the tree of the field" (Deuteronomy 20:19) and that the 'fruit' we bear is not only children (which is the first mitzvah in the Torah we are given to fulfill) but also the living of a life embedded in goodness. It's become tradition that folks plant trees and/or hold a Tu b'Shevat seder during which it is customary to eat dried fruits and nuts, specifically figs, dates, raisins, carob, and almonds. Many people also incorporate the Seven Species into their seders, wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.

I also encourage you to incorporate these chocolate treats into your seder cause they're delicious and fun to make. Please note that the trees I used in my recipe are NOT edible. They are there cause they're just too cute. What is edible? The several layers of chocolate used to assemble these treats. My favorite component is the homemade chocolate cookie crumble. You can also always take the trees out of the scenario and have yourself a fancy little trifle dessert for any day of the week. Enjoy!

















She just HAD to get into the picture.

### **Ingredients/Method**

*(Makes for 4 – 5 mini trifles depending upon how much you use during assembly)*

### **For the Cake and Pudding:**

OK, so for the cake and pudding I used ready-made items cause I have 2 kids, a full time job and am 6 months pregnant so SOMETHING had to give. You can opt to also use Oreo cookies for your cookie crumbles but the chocolate cookie crumble recipe provided is so user-friendly and nets you incredibly delicious crumbles. For the cake, I used Betty Crocker's Original Recipe Scratch Cake Mix but any ol' boxed cake will do. The pudding was your trusted Jell-O Dark Chocolate Pudding Packs. I also incorporated chopped nuts into my recipe but feel free to omit if you have a nut allergy!

## **For the Chocolate Cookie Crumbles:**

(makes 2 1/2 cups)

- 2/3 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 2/3 cup cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

## **Method for Chocolate Crumbs:**

- Preheat the oven to 350 (F).
- Combine 2/3 cup flour, 1 teaspoon cornstarch, 1/2 cup granulated sugar, 2/3 cup cocoa powder, and 1 teaspoon kosher salt in the bowl of a freestanding electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment on low-speed until mixed.
- Add 6 tablespoons melted unsalted butter and paddle on low-speed until the mixture starts together in small clusters and clumps – at this point, it should look a little bit like wet sand.
- Spread the clusters on a parchment-lined sheet pan. Bake for 20 minutes, using a dough scraper to break them up occasionally. The crumbs should still be slightly moist to the touch at that point; they will harden and dry as they cool.
- Let the crumbs cool completely before using in the recipe.

## **For the Vanilla Buttercream Frosting:**

- 3/4 cup butter, softened to room temperature
- 2 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 – 2 tablespoons milk or cream



- pinch of salt

### **Method for Vanilla Buttercream Frosting:**

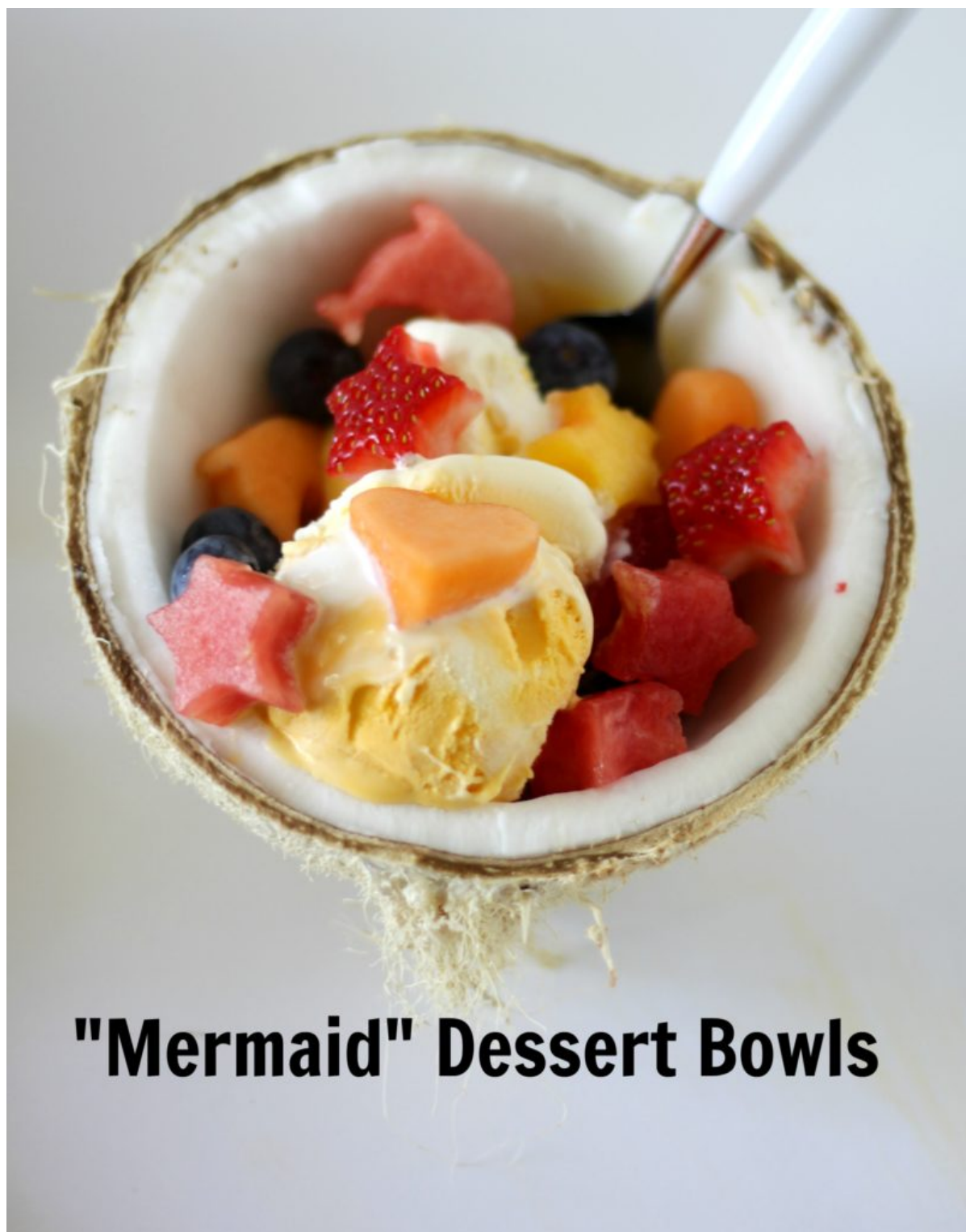
- In a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or using an electric hand mixer whip the butter until light and creamy on medium/high-speed.
- Once the butter is pale in color and light slowly add in the confectioners' sugar one spoon at a time on medium speed. Let the sugar fully incorporate before adding in more sugar.
- Add the vanilla extract, salt and cream.
- Whip on high-speed for another 3-4 minutes until very light, creamy, and fluffy.
- Use the buttercream straight away for keep it refrigerated for up to 4 weeks. Before use make sure it comes to room temperature.

### **Assembly:**

I assembled by adding a base layer of pudding, then cookie crumble, vanilla buttercream (piped from a piping bag), chopped peanuts, another layer of cookie crumbs followed by chocolate cake that my kiddo crumbled up herself and then one final layer of cookie crumble. I encourage you to try-out your own order of assembly though it should be noted that this order got rave reviews from the husband and kiddo.

---

## **“Mermaid” Fruit Bowls**



## **"Mermaid" Dessert Bowls**

You ever wonder how it is you got somewhere? Not like, "I'm at home and now I'm at Target. How did that happen?" Because, really, we all know how that happens. The more appropriate question for Target is, "I went in for toilet paper. How did I end up walking out with \$150 worth of goods?" Damn you, Target!!!

But no, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about

looking back at your life and wondering how it 'landed' you where you are today. Case in point: This passed week I found myself how it was that I was managing a camping trip of roughly 110 9th graders and, like, I was in charge (of that camp – thank Gd, not of the whole trip). I was, however, put in charge of all medical issues—assessing, treating (with what little equipment I had), making calls on who needs off the island NOW and who can wait. I think back to who I was a decade ago or even 20 years ago as a fresh graduate of high school and I think, “There’s no way in hell I saw myself doing what I’m doing now”. Of course I had always wanted to be rock star—singing is the ONE thing I can confidentially say that I do well. I charted my course for that as well. I took lessons forever. I immersed myself in musical theater. I even went to college of a theater scholarship. But alas, I took a different direction when I was 19. When I was 19 I spent the summer working for a rehabilitation camp for Kosovo refugee children and that was it. I went to college the next year, changed my major from theater to political science (which is just theater for unattractive people) and starting working on my career as an advocate. I didn’t know that that’s what it was I wanted to be at that time but, in looking back at what I wanted, that was definitely ‘it’.

I guess you could say my dreams of becoming an advocate have come true. I advocate for my students CONSTANTLY and sometimes? Sometimes people actually listen . . . but not as much as I’d like. That said, I think I might possibly be living my dream. It’s not the dream of accepting a TONY award (I’ve had that speech prepared since I was 12) or of running a nationally recognized nonprofit (I love my family too much to give my whole life to running a nonprofit. Also? I don’t know how to run a nonprofit. Details.). But it is the dream of advocacy. Albeit, a different kind but I love it all the same.



So what does this have to do with fruit bowls and mermaids? Well, the other thing I NEVER thought I'd be doing is running the little food blog. Or any food blog, for that matter. Heck,

even cooking! My first roommate and I used to add frozen vegetables to pots of Rice a-Roni and call it gourmet. I did not know how to cook for a very long time. That said, I still loved entertaining and would go out of my way to make sure the table setting looked great . . . most likely because I knew the food was going to be terrible but hey! At least it looked pretty. This post is an extension of that old Whitney. It doesn't take a lot of culinary 'know-how' and it really doesn't take a lot of talent. It does, however, take a few coconuts, some fruit and tiny little cookie cutters. Tiny cookie cutters came into my life last year when I was reading a Pinterest post on fun kid lunch ideas for school. Someone showed tiny cheese sandwiches in the shapes of various animals and I was like, "Can adults also eat that cause that's the cutest thing I've ever seen. Show me the Amazon link IMMEDIATELY". A batch of animals, hearts, stars and Mickey Mouse ears later and I'm cutting everything I see into fun, tiny shapes. So if you've got friends and family coming over for a Shavuot or Memorial Day meal and you need a fun dessert recipe, STAT or you just really enjoy cutting foods into tiny shapes, this is the recipe for you. I hope you enjoy! Chag Sameach!

















## **Mermaid Dessert Bowls**

### **Ingredients:**

1 whole coconut, cut in half  
1/2 mango, sliced long and thick  
1 pint strawberries  
1 pint blueberries  
1 package pineapple, sliced long and thick  
1 pint ice cream

### **Directions:**

First, drain the coconut. Seeing as that I am not, in fact a mermaid and that we definitely didn't have coconuts falling from the trees where I grew up in Marietta, GA, my husband and I totally searched "WikiHow" to figure out the best way to cut a coconut in half as precisely as possible. We found that #3 works best from the site: 3 Ways to Open a Coconut.

Once you drained and rinsed out your coconut, set it aside. Next, using your favorite tiny cookie cutters, cut out as many tiny figures as possible. I used a tiny heart, dolphin and star cookie cutter to create a more 'under the sea' vibe.

Next, scoop out as much ice cream as you want and top with fruit. No one's pretending this is a difficult 'recipe', but it is a fun one at that. Enjoy after Instagramming so that all your friends know you're having a deliciously fun mermaid time!

P.S. Use all the leftover fruit scraps to make one delicious fruit smoothie! Waste not; want not!

---

# Sheet Pan Chicken – Quick and Kosher-for-Passover



I'm currently sitting in bed. I'm sitting in bed and I'm trying to take care of myself. It hasn't been easy lately. Every since having our second baby, I feel like I'm in a constant game of catch-up. I know this sounds crazy, but I'm not sure why having the second kiddo destroyed me as much as it did. OK, "destroyed me" is a little dramatic, but I can't seem to stay awake past 9pm, which means I average a decent night sleep. And, thank Gd, my kids are pretty decent sleepers. So why am I so tired?



I've decided there are tons of answers to this question. Maybe it's the fact that I over-schedule my day, just like most every other person I know. It also probably has to do with not exercising as much as I should but mostly I think it has to do

with the amount of stuff I have reeling around in my head. I appreciate the feminist movement and I consider myself a feminist but I'm not sure the feminist movement of the 70s knew what it was getting into when it rallied for fair and equal employment opportunities for women. But, I am grateful. I used to work in a school whose administration over-valued stress and exhaustion. People were heralded for working long hours; the bags under their eyes their little red badges of courage. Now I work for a school where taking a 'mental health day' is understood. I have a boss who openly talks about why she doesn't want us answering texts and phone calls after working hours – the boundary of work and life firmly in tact and celebrated. But still, I get home after picking up the girls and I still struggle with balancing all my responsibilities. When beloved friend and co-author, Sarah at The Patchke Princess started her Sheet-Pan Dinners Instagram handle, I started following immediately. She's a lot braver than me when it comes with experimenting with sheet-pan dinners, but nevertheless, she has inspired the recipe in this post. We eat meat at least once a week, aside from Shabbat, and being able to throw it on a sheet pan, combine it with roasted vegetables and the perfect seasoning without having to clean anything else makes me so happy. I mean seriously, it is the little things and no additional cleaning is to be celebrated as a big 'little thing'. Consider this sheet pan chicken a blank slate for which to experiment for further dinners. I hope you enjoy.









## Sheet Pan Chicken

### Ingredients:

2 chicken leg quarters, cut at bone and separated

3 carrots, skinned and cut into 1/4-inch rounds

5-6 Yukon Gold potatoes, quartered

1 medium onion, quartered

1/2 pint cherry tomatoes

3 garlic cloves, diced

1/4 cup olive oil

3 tbsp parve Ranch dressing mix powder

1/4 cup mayonnaise

1 tbsp kosher salt

1/2 tbsp black pepper

#### Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 400°F. Place a large 9 x 13" rimmed baking sheet in the oven while the oven is heating. While that's heating, combine Ranch dressing mix, mayonnaise, kosher salt and black pepper into a medium-sized bowl. Stir to combine. Set aside.

Clean chicken and dry well. Using a spatula or spoon, coat the chicken in the Ranch mayonnaise mixture. Place the chicken skin-side down on the pre-heated baking sheet. Let that cook for about 10 minutes.

While the chicken cooks, combine all the vegetables into a large bowl. Add olive oil, garlic, salt and pepper to the bowl and stir until well-combined. Once the chicken has cooked for 10 minutes, add the vegetable mixture to the sheet-pan, making sure that none of the vegetables overlap, and cook for another 20 – 25 minutes or until vegetables are soft.

Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.