

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.

Siona's Vanilla Cake with Chocolate + Tahini Sauce

**Siona's
Vanilla Cake +
Chocolate + Tahini
Sauce**



I swear this blog is not turning into a dessert blog. I also swear this blog is not being sponsored by a tahini company (though I wouldn't be opposed to it . . . hint, hint tahini companies). Anyway, like I said, this blog is not necessary a dessert blog it's just that with the holidays approaching, my husband finishing his PhD and Winter Break officially beginning, we've got a lot to celebrate and plenty of reasons to bake!



My crazy sous chef.



I call this recipe, "Siona's Vanilla Cake" for two reasons. 1) It's so easy to make that when I need to bring a quick dessert

for a Shabbat dinner or potluck, she and I grab our matching Jewhungry aprons and within minutes, we've got ourselves a cake baking in the oven and 2) this kid LOVES vanilla cake. Most cake she actually just eats the frosting off of and then doesn't actually eat the cake but this cake? This cake she'll devour. The additional chocolate sauce and sprinkles helps too.

I love baking with this kid. It started a couple years ago when she and I had just moved to LA and the hubby was still in Miami finishing his PhD work. I needed something for us to do on Sunday mornings and we just naturally fell into the habit of baking together. She has mastered the scrapping down of the bowl in between mixing and can sift flour like a pro-baker. Let's not forget, she's 4. Baking together has become such a normal part of our weekends that she actually has turned down the opportunity to watch a movie in favor of baking together. Seriously. Hashtag parenting win.





I can't express to you how easy peasy this cake is to make. The chocolate and tahini sauce aren't a necessity but, I mean, come on. It's chocolate and tahini sauce so yeah, it's a necessity. It also dresses up the cake so if you do bring it to a potluck, folks will be all, "OMG! Did you make that?! It's gorgeous". And you'll be all, "Hell yeah I did. Who's the Cake Boss now, Buddy!?"



Ingredients for Cake:

1 cup margarine (I use Earth's Balance) at room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
3 large eggs
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp baking soda
2 tsps baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup vegan sour cream (I used Tofutti)
2 tablespoons clear imitation vanilla extract (this is what gives it that old timey cake flavor).

Chocolate Sauce recipe [HERE](#)

For tahini sauce:

1/4 cup raw tahini
4 tbsp of hot water

Directions for Tahini:

Combine ingredients and stir until well-combined.

Directions for Cake:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Spray a Bundt pan with non-stick canola oil spray and set aside.

In a medium bowl, sift the flour, baking soda, baking powder and salt together. Set aside.

In the bowl of a mixer, cream together the butter and sugar. With the mixer on low, add the eggs one at a time beating after each addition. Add in the flour mixture, and then the sour cream and vanilla. Beat well until combined. The batter will be thick.

Spoon the batter into the Bundt pan. Bake until golden brown, 35 to 45 minutes. (Mine took 45 minutes but every oven is different and due to the density of this batter, you will want to make sure it is clearly cooked in the middle.)

Remove the cake from the oven and allow to cool in the pan for 15 minutes. Turn out onto a cooling rack and continue to cool to room temperature.

Once completely cooled, artfully drizzle the chocolate sauce onto the cake followed by the tahini sauce. Add sprinkles at your leisure.

Vegan Funfetti Cheesecake Bites {No-Bake + GF}

Vegan Funfetti Cheesecake Bites



Summer break is winding down and, as expected, I have done about half the things I said I was going to do. I have made a total of ZERO baby mobiles, even though we have friends who popping out new babies left and right. I have also made a total of ZERO yarn wall hangings even though my Pinterest is lousy with saved projects. I've also read zero books but did read the entirety of the latest issues of Vanity Fair and Bon Appetit so that's something, right? The good news is that along with the laundry list of things I didn't do this summer break is a list of things I did do!





Of the things I did this summer (in no particular order of importance):

1. Caught up on all episodes of UnReal
2. Caught up on all episodes of The Good Wife
3. Caught up on season 3 of The Great British Baking Show
4. Made rainbow bagels from scratch
5. Slept 9 hours IN ONE NIGHT!
6. Watched 8 movies (yes, some of those included movies involving Tinkerbell and friends, but hey, they were full length feature films so they count).
7. Snuggled with children for hours on end
8. Taught youngest babe to play 'peek a boo'
9. Drank an espresso and tonic (it was shockingly very good).
10. Went to The Broad Museum in downtown LA

11. Went to Palm Springs with beloved dear friend and NO CHILDREN
12. Finally met Shannon Goldberg, of The Noshers, in real life (and to no one's surprise, she is a complete delight).

So, you see, I've actually accomplished quite a lot if you really think about it. It's like my social worker sister, Brene Brown says, we got to focus on what we accomplish in the day rather than the things we do not. A person can really feel accomplished when ignoring the list of things one didn't complete instead of the things we did accomplish.

Another thing on the 'accomplish' list is the recipe for these little vegan cheesecake bites. I've seen countless recipes for vegan cheesecake and I've always wanted to try it. They make the perfect parve dessert for a meat Shabbat or holiday meal and they are raw so NO BAKING. Hallelujah! I hope you really like them. I was inspired by the vegan goddess that is Dana over at The Minimalist Baker. If you don't know her stuff, well, I'm just gonna assume you've been in a coma for years because that's the only conceivable reason I could understand for not knowing her.

Happy no baking!









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