

Chocolate Zucchini Gardener's Sheet Cake

by KC Hysmith (for Woodlark Blog)

Makes one 9×13" cake

Ingredients for the cake:

- 1 cup buckwheat flour
- 1 cup all purpose flour
- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cocoa powder
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup shredded zucchini, lightly patted dry (do not wring out the moisture)
- 1 cup boiling water

Ingredients for the garden decorations:

- 3-4 cups favorite chocolate buttercream (we like American buttercream)
- 1-1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups crushed chocolate cookies or graham crackers (about 9 whole graham crackers), be sure to leave some pea-sized pieces intact to create the look of uneven soil
- Marzipan (alternatives include modeling chocolate and fondant; an inedible, but foodsafe option could be modeling beeswax)
- All-natural food coloring (we like to use ingredients like yellow turmeric, red beet root powder, and green matcha tea)

Tools:

- Cake pan (roughly 9 x 13 inch)
- Two large bowls
- Grater
- Spoon and whisk
- Toothpicks
- Piping bag or zip-top bag
- Parchment paper

Instructions:

1. Set the oven to 350 degrees and grease a 9×13 inch baking dish.
2. In a bowl, combine the flours, sugar, cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
3. In a second larger bowl, combine the milk, oil, and the vanilla. Stir in the shredded zucchini.
4. Fold the dry ingredients into the wet until just combined. Add the boiling water and stir until smooth. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top. Transfer to the oven and bake until a toothpick inserted into the middle of the cake comes out clean, about 20 to 25 minutes.
5. While the cake cools, prepare the marzipan. Decide what vegetables you want to plant in your garden and portion out pieces of marzipan. Add a little bit of dye to each piece of marzipan kneading the dye to incorporate it (if you don't want to stain your fingers, a zip-top bag or a piece of beeswax cloth wrap is helpful here). Keep the marzipan and any marzipan vegetables on a parchment lined surface to avoid sticking.

Tips on making marzipan garden produce:

- Marzipan feels and acts a lot like play-dough. You can roll, shape, and combine colors to create any vegetable or fruit you'd like!
- While you work, keep your hands slightly damp, rinsing off the sticky sugar residue from handling the marzipan every once and a while.
- Lots of produce is green or has green foliage, so dye a larger portion of your marzipan one or more shades of green.
- Remember that food dye, even natural ones, will darken with time, so be careful not to add too much! You can always add more later.
- Tools like forks, spoons, and toothpicks can help you achieve different textures and shapes.
- Don't forget to utilize all-natural sprinkles, seeds or nuts from the pantry, and things like cocoa powder to craft the finer details of the vegetables.

How to decorate your garden cake

Once the cake has cooled, spread about 2 cups of frosting across the cake, creating a smooth surface. Transfer the remaining frosting to a piping bag or zip-top bag with a wide round opening at the tip. Pipe thick, evenly spaced tubes of frosting across the shortest sides of the cake. These will be the garden rows.

Sprinkle the crushed cookies on top of the frosting, filling in any holes near the piped tubes to create the appearance of tilled garden rows. With the back of a spoon, pat the crushed cookie soil down, if necessary.

Place your marzipan vegetables on the rows, gently pushing them into the frosting soil. Alternatively, reserve the marzipan produce on another tray and let each person pick a few fruits and vegetables to add to their slice of garden. Serve with glasses of iced tea or lemonade (a great refresher after all that hard work in the garden) or even a scoop of green-tea ice cream.