

WOODLAND CAKE

(published with permission from Kim Joy)

for the cake:

used the recipe from Ina Garten, available [here](#)

(exact amounts as shown, baked in 3 cake pans, 6 inch diameter)

for chocolate bark:

100g brown candy melts

500g white chocolate, tempered

for coconut-chocolate ganache:

400g dark chocolate, chopped into small pieces

300 mL coconut milk

100 to 250g powdered sugar

for praline':

130g super fine sugar

35mL water

1 tsp liquid cornstarch (optional)

75g hazelnuts peeled and toasted

for mushroom meringue:

140g superfine sugar

80g egg whites

pinch of cream of tartar

for cookies (optional):

use any favorite recipe for gingerbread cookies

Bake the cake according to the recipe in the link, using 3 round pans with 6-inch in diameter. Cool completely. It can be prepared a couple of days in advance, reserve in the fridge.

Make the chocolate bark. Lay out a rectangular piece of parchment paper measuring roughly 9 1/2 x 27 1/2 inches. Melt the brown candy melts gently in the microwave. Use a paintbrush to paint dots and stripes to mimi the pattern of a birch tree. Let it cool to harden.

Temper the white chocolate and pour on top of the paper with the design already painted and set. Spread gently with an offset spatula to get a smooth,

thin coating. Once the chocolate sets, break into pieces of bark (easier way to do it is by hand, using a knife tends to shatter the pieces). Reserve. Can be prepared the day before.

Make the mushroom meringues. Heat the oven to 400F, line a baking sheet with parchment paper and spread the sugar over it. Bake for about 8 minutes until warm but not caramelized. Leave the door open for the sugar to cool down to about 212F.

Add the egg whites to a KitchenAid type mixer and whisk at high speed until you get soft peaks. Add the cream of tartar then the baked sugar very slowly, about 1 Tablespoon at a time, allowing it to dissolve before adding more. Transfer to a piping bag and pipe small blobs to be the head of the mushrooms and small stalks piping with the bag straight up, to form the stalks.

Bake at 200F for 60 to 90 minutes, depending on how dry you like them to be. Switch the oven off and leave the meringues inside for a couple of hours to get the meringues fully dry. To form the mushrooms, make a small hole in the bottom of the “caps”, and use some melted chocolate or candy melts to glue the stalk into it. Shower the mushrooms with cocoa powder if you like.

Make the praline paste. Add the sugar, water and cornstarch to a pan. Stir to combine, then stop stirring, bring to a boil. Meanwhile spread the hazelnuts over a Silpat or parchment paper. When the sugar mixture turns amber in color, pour quickly over the hazelnuts, and allow it to fully set. Break into pieces and place in a food processor, blitzing it into a paste. Reserve.

Make the coconut ganache. Place the chocolate in a large Pyrex type bowl. Heat the coconut milk until it starts to bubble. Pour over the chocolate and let it sit undisturbed for 2 minutes. Stir until fully smooth. Add the sugar and whisk with a handheld mixer until just combined. Transfer 2/3 of the ganache to a bowl and chill for 15 minutes. This portion will be used to coat the cake. Add the praline paste to the remaining 1/3 of the ganache. This will be used to fill the cake layers.

Optional step: Bake gingerbread cookies in the shape of your choice to decorate the cake, icing them if you like.

ASSEMBLE THE CAKE: Place one cake layer over a cardboard round and add ganache/praline mixture on top. Place second layer of cake, repeat the spreading of ganache, and the final cake layer on top. Coat the sides and top with the pure ganache. Set the cake in the fridge for an hour or so. Transfer it to the serving platter.

Adjust the size of the chocolate bark so that pieces will overlap the cake all around and have more or less similar heights. Remember that nature is never fully perfect, so go with the flow. Melt some candy melts if needed, for the bark to stick better to the cake.

Add the cookies and meringue on top of the cake, spread some coconut flakes around the bottom, a few more meringues. Say I love you, and serve!