

devils food cake

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Devil's Food Cake

The dark, soft, faintly reddish American chocolate layer cake, named around 1900 as the opposite number to angel food. What makes it devil's food rather than plain chocolate cake is chemistry: natural cocoa plus baking soda, which raises the pH, deepens the colour towards mahogany and softens the crumb.

What makes it work

- **Natural cocoa and baking soda, not Dutch cocoa and powder.** Natural cocoa is acidic; the soda

neutralises it, and the reaction is both the lift and the colour shift. Use Dutch-process here and you get a good cake that is not this one. See [Cocoa and cocoa mixes](#).

- **Bloom the cocoa in boiling liquid.** Hot water or coffee poured over the cocoa dissolves the solids and releases aromatics that stay locked up in a dry mix.
- **Coffee, not for flavour.** It amplifies chocolate and disappears; see [coffee](#).
- **Buttermilk for tenderness and tang.** Its acid also keeps the crumb soft; see [buttermilk recipes](#).
- **Do not overbake.** Two minutes past done and a chocolate cake goes dry irreversibly. Pull it when a skewer has moist crumbs, not when it is clean.

Ingredients

Two 20 cm layers. Serves 12.

- 85 g natural cocoa powder
- 240 ml boiling water or hot [coffee](#)
- 225 g unsalted butter, softened
- 300 g light brown sugar
- 100 g granulated sugar
- 3 [eggs](#)
- 2 tsp vanilla — see [Pure vanilla extract](#)
- 280 g all-purpose flour
- 8 g baking soda
- 5 g fine salt
- 180 ml buttermilk

Frosting — chocolate fudge:

- 300 g dark chocolate, chopped — see [Chocolates](#)
- 300 ml double cream
- 60 g unsalted butter
- 40 g [honey](#) or golden syrup

Method

Heat the oven to **175 °C / 350 °F**. Butter and line two 20 cm tins.

Whisk the cocoa into the boiling liquid until smooth and set it aside to cool to lukewarm.

Cream the butter and both sugars four minutes. Beat in the eggs one at a time, then the vanilla.

Alternate the flour, soda and salt with the buttermilk in three additions, then mix in the cooled cocoa liquid. The batter is thin.

Divide by weight and bake **28–32 minutes**, until a skewer shows moist crumbs. Cool ten minutes in the tins, then turn out.

For the frosting, pour hot cream over the chocolate, stand two minutes, stir smooth, then beat in the butter and honey. Cool until spreadable, about an hour at room temperature.

Notes

- **The reddish tint** is real and comes from anthocyanins in natural cocoa at higher pH. It is also the ancestor of [red velvet cake](#), which is what happened when bakers pushed the effect with dye.
- Three thin layers look better than two thick ones and bake in 22 minutes.
- **Keeps four days** at room temperature under a dome. Refrigerating a butter-frosted cake makes it hard; bring it back to 20 °C before serving.

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