Italian Rum Cake
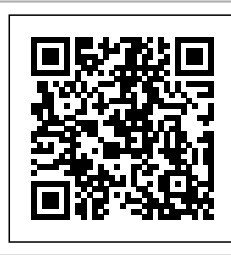
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Serves 12-16

Prep Time: 45 minutes
Cook Time: 1 hours 0 minutes

Ingredients

For the sponge:
__6 Eggs
__1 cup of Sugar
__1/2 tsp of Lemon Zest, optional
__Pinch of Salt
__1-1/4 cups of Cake Flour
__Splash of Vanilla Extract
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For the Custard:
__2 1/2 cups of Whole Milk
__4 Egg Yolks
__Splash of Vanilla Extract or Italian Vanilla Powder
__1/4 cup of Sugar
__1/4 cup of Flour
__Pinch of Salt
__Lemon Rind
__2oz (1/4 cup) of Chopped Semisweet chocolate or chocolate chips
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For the Syrup:
__1 cup of Water
__2/3 cup of Sugar
__1/3 cup of Dark Rum
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For the Whipped Cream:
__1-1/4 cup of Heavy Cream
__4 Tbsp of Powdered Sugar
__1-1/2 tsp of Instant Vanilla Pudding
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Additional ingredients:
__1-1/2 cups of Sliced Almonds, toasted
__Maraschino Cherries

1) Preheat your oven to 350 degrees, line the bottom of an 8 inch springform pan with parchment paper and set aside.

2) Start with the custard. In a saucepan, add the milk and lemon peel, simmer over medium low heat, meanwhile, in a bowl, using a handheld electric whisk, whisk together the egg yolks and sugar until thick, pale and frothy, add in the vanilla, salt and flour, whisk to incorporate then, slowly, while whisking, drizzle in about a cup of the hot milk, then pour the whole mixture into the pan with the simmering milk and simmer all together while constantly stirring and cook about 6-7 minutes or until well thickened.

3) Divide mixture into 2 small bowls, add the chocolate to one of the bowls with the custard then give it a minute then whisk to melt the chocolate in the custard, then cover both bowls with plastic wrap insuring the plastic wrap is directly touching the custard to prevent a skin from forming, refrigerate until later.

4) Move onto the cake. In a large bowl, using a handheld electric whisk, whisk the eggs with the sugar until really pale and frothy, whisk in the flour, salt, vanilla and lemon zest, then once well combined, spread batter evenly in your prepared pan, bake for 35-40 minutes (testing it around 35 minutes to make sure it's fully baked) the turn the oven off, open the door slightly and leave the cake in for 5 minutes, then take it out of the oven and allow to cool completely.

5) Next up, make the syrup. In a saucepan, add the sugar and water to simmer until the sugar dissolves, allow to cool to room temperature then add the rum, stir and set aside.

6) When ready to assemble, carefully get the cake out of the pan by running a knife along the edge to loosen it, then carefully cut the cake into 3 equal parts horizontally, place the bottom piece back in the cake pan (line the cake pan with a piece of parchment first to catch any drippings) the drizzle about 1/3 of the syrup evenly all over, then top with the chocolate custard, followed by the second (middle) layer of cake, drizzle that with 1/3 of the syrup, then the vanilla custard. Take the top piece of the cake, add 2/3 of the leftover syrup to the bottom cut side of the cake, place it on the top layer of the custard and drizzle the remaining syrup over the top then cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for a minimum of about 4 hours but overnight is really best.

7) When ready to serve, whip the cream and powdered sugar until it forms soft peaks, then add the instant pudding and continue whisking until it forms stiff peaks. Decorate with the cream, cherries and press the almonds all around the side. Serve and enjoy!