



Triple Chocolate Layer Cake



4.9 from 668 reviews

Author: [Sally](#) Prep Time: 30 minutes Cook Time: 25 minutes Total Time: 4 hours Yield: serves 12

This is my favorite homemade chocolate cake recipe. With a super moist crumb and fudgy, yet light texture, this chocolate cake recipe will be your favorite too. Top with chocolate buttercream and chocolate chips for 3x the chocolate flavor. You can also prepare this chocolate layer cake as a sheet cake too. See recipe note.

Ingredients

- 1 and 3/4 cups (219g) **all-purpose flour** ([spoon & leveled](#))
- 3/4 cup (62g) unsweetened natural **cocoa powder**
- 1 and 3/4 cups (350g) **granulated sugar**
- 2 teaspoons **baking soda**
- 1 teaspoon **baking powder**
- 1 teaspoon **salt**
- 2 teaspoons **espresso powder** (optional)
- 1/2 cup (120ml) **vegetable oil** (or canola oil or melted coconut oil)
- 2 large **eggs**, at room temperature
- 2 teaspoons **pure vanilla extract**
- 1 cup (240ml) **buttermilk**, at room temperature
- 1 cup (240ml) freshly brewed strong **hot coffee** (regular or decaf)

Chocolate Buttercream

- 1.25 cups (2.5 sticks or 290g) **unsalted butter**, softened to [room temperature](#)
- 3 and 1/2 cups (420g) **confectioners' sugar**
- 3/4 cup (65g) **unsweetened cocoa powder** (natural or dutch process)
- 3–5 Tablespoons (45-75ml) **heavy cream** (or half-and-half or milk), at room temperature
- 1/4 teaspoon **salt**
- 1 teaspoon **pure vanilla extract**
- optional for decoration: semi-sweet chocolate chips

Instructions

- 1 Preheat oven to 350°F (177°C). Grease two [9-inch cake pans](#), line with parchment paper, then grease the parchment paper. Parchment paper helps the cakes seamlessly release from the pans.
- 2 **Make the cake:** Whisk the flour, cocoa powder, sugar, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and espresso powder (if using) together in a large bowl. Set aside. Using a handheld or stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment (or you can use a whisk) mix the oil, eggs, and vanilla together on

medium-high speed until combined. Add the buttermilk and mix until combined. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients, add the hot water/coffee, and whisk or beat on low speed until the batter is completely combined. Batter is thin.

- 3 Divide batter evenly between pans. Bake for 23-26 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Baking times vary, so keep an eye on yours. The cakes are done when a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. (**Note:** Even if they're completely done, the cooled cakes may *slightly* sink in the center. Cocoa powder is simply not as structurally strong as all-purpose flour and can't hold up to all the moisture necessary to make a moist tasting chocolate cake. It's normal!)
- 4 Remove the cakes from the oven and set on a wire rack. Allow to cool completely in the pan.
- 5 **Make the buttercream:** With a handheld or stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter on medium speed until creamy – about 2 minutes. Add confectioners' sugar, cocoa powder, 3 Tablespoons heavy cream, salt, and vanilla extract. Beat on low speed for 30 seconds, then increase to high speed and beat for 1 full minute. Do not over- whip. Add 1/4 cup more confectioners' sugar or cocoa powder if frosting is too thin or 1-2 more Tablespoons of cream if frosting is too thick. (I usually add 1 more.) Taste. Add another pinch of salt if desired.
- 6 **Assemble and frost:** If cooled cakes are domed on top, use a large serrated knife to slice a thin layer off the tops to create a flat surface. This is called “leveling” the cakes. Discard or crumble over finished cake. Place 1 cake layer on your cake stand or serving plate. Evenly cover the top with frosting. Top with 2nd layer and spread remaining frosting all over the top and sides. I always use an [icing spatula](#) and [bench scraper](#) for the frosting. Garnish with chocolate chips, if desired.
- 7 Refrigerate cake for at least 30-60 minutes before slicing. This helps the cake hold its shape when cutting.
- 8 Cover leftover cake tightly and store in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

Notes

- 1 **Make Ahead & Freezing Instructions:** Prepare cake through step 4. Wrap the individual baked and cooled cake layers tightly and refrigerate for up to 2 days or freeze up to 3 months. Bring to room temperature then continue with step 5. You can prepare the chocolate buttercream 2-3 days in advance. Cover and refrigerate, then bring to room temperature before spreading onto/assembling the cake. Frosted cake freezes well, up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator, then bring to room temperature or serve cold.
- 2 **3 Layer Cake:** You can also prepare this cake as a 3 layer cake. Divide batter between three 8-inch or 9-inch cake pans and bake for 22-25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. This frosting will be enough for 3 layers. If desired, use the frosting recipe from my [Piñata Cake](#) if you want extra frosting.
- 3 **Cocoa Powder:** Use natural cocoa powder in the cake, not dutch-process. (See [dutch-process vs natural cocoa powder](#) for more information.) Since there is no leavening occurring in frosting,

you can use either natural or dutch-process in the chocolate buttercream.

4 **Buttermilk:** Buttermilk is required for this recipe. You can make your own DIY version of buttermilk if needed. Add 2 teaspoons of white vinegar or lemon juice to a liquid measuring cup. Then add enough room temperature whole milk to the same measuring cup until it reaches 1 cup. (In a pinch, lower fat or nondairy milks work for this soured milk, but the cake won't taste as moist or rich.) Stir it around and let sit for 5 minutes. The homemade "buttermilk" will be somewhat curdled and ready to use in the recipe.

5 **Sour Cream Version:** Lately I've been using a mix of sour cream and buttermilk, as well as reducing the hot coffee. Reduce the buttermilk and hot coffee to 1/2 cup (120ml) each. Add 3/4 cup (180g) of room temperature full-fat sour cream with the wet ingredients. You can see this described above, in the video tutorial, and in my [dark chocolate mousse cake](#). That cake and this cake are both fantastically moist, but the sour cream version has a slightly sturdier crumb.

6 **FAQ:** The sour cream version (note above) makes a sturdy enough cake that will hold under fondant.

7 **Amount of Cake Batter:** This recipe (and the sour cream version) yields about 6 cups of batter, which is helpful if you need it for different [Cake Pan Sizes & Conversions](#).

8 **Room Temperature Ingredients:** All refrigerated items should be at room temperature so the batter mixes together easily and evenly. [Read here for more](#) information.

9 **Espresso Powder/Coffee:** Espresso powder and coffee will not make the cake taste like coffee. Instead, they deepen the chocolate flavor. I highly recommend them both. You can use the same amount of instant coffee (the powder) instead of espresso powder if desired. If coffee isn't your thing, you can leave out the espresso powder and use extra hot water or hot chai tea.

10 **Bundt Pan:** I recommend my [chocolate cream cheese bundt cake](#) but without the cream cheese filling. Reduce buttermilk in that recipe to 1/4 cup and increase sour cream to 1 cup.

11 **9×13 Inch Pan:** You can bake this cake in a 9×13 inch baking pan. Same oven temperature, about 35-40 minutes bake time.

12 **Chocolate Cupcakes:** Here is my favorite [chocolate cupcakes recipe](#). Same unbelievable texture as this cake! (You'll notice I don't use hot liquid in that recipe. That's because there isn't the same volume of dry ingredients to break up. If you need more than 1 dozen chocolate cupcakes, use this chocolate cake recipe for 2-3 dozen. Same baking instructions as my [chocolate cupcakes](#).

i *Recipe adapted from [Ina Garten](#) and originally from [Hershey's](#)*

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