Strawberry Ombre Cake with White Chocolate Cream Cheese Buttercream Frosting

Ingredients   Yield: 4 Layer Cake **or** 28 to 32 cupcakes

Remember to level all measurements when baking and read the entire recipe before proceeding.

Cake Batter
- ¾ Cup Fresh Strawberries, finely diced
- 3 Sticks (1½ Cups) Unsalted Butter plus 1 to 2 Tablespoons set aside
    for preparing the cake pans, room temperature
- 2¾ Cups Granulated Sugar
- 8 Egg Whites, room temperature
- 2 Tablespoons Pure Strawberry Extract
- 5 Teaspoons Baking Powder
- 1¼ Teaspoons Kosher Salt or 1 Teaspoon Table Salt
- 1 Cup All Purpose Flour, plus 1 to 2 Tablespoons set aside for preparing the cake pans
- 2 Cups Cake Flour
- 1½ Cups Buttermilk, room temperature
- Red Food Coloring

White Chocolate Cream Cheese Buttercream Frosting
- 12 Ounces Premium White Chocolate Wafers (Guittard recommended) **or** Lindt White Chocolate Bars (white chocolate chips are not recommended for this recipe)
- 12 Ounces Cream Cheese, room temperature
- 8 Ounces Unsalted Butter, room temperature
- 1½ Teaspoons Pure Vanilla Extract
- 3½ Cups Powdered Sugar (a.k.a Confectioners Sugar)

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees

Finely dice the strawberries and place into a small bowl, set aside. In a large bowl combine the sugar and butter and blend with a hand mixer on medium speed until fluffy and well combined, about 3 minutes or so. Switch to low speed and add the egg whites two at a time until blended and follow with the strawberry extract.

In a medium bowl, sift the all-purpose flour, cake flour, baking powder, and salt. (Note: You may also whisk the entire flour mixture well.) Use 1 Tablespoon of the flour mixture and mix with the diced strawberries, set aside.

Alternately add and mix in the flour mixture and buttermilk to the wet mixture as follows: 1/3 of the flour mixture, half of the buttermilk, 1/3 flour mixture, (stop and scrape down the bowl with a spatula), the remaining half of the buttermilk, and follow with the remaining flour mixture. Using a spatula, fold the strawberries into the cake batter. Scrape down the bowl making sure all of the batter is well mixed.

Butter and flour all of the 9 inch cake pans and set aside. Measure out and level 2¼ cups of batter for the first layer and place into a small bowl. Fold 2 drops of red food coloring into the batter until the color of the batter is completely changed. Pour the batter into one of the prepared cake pans. Repeat with each layer using the recommended amount of food coloring: Layer #1= 2 drops, Layer #2= 6 drops, Layer #3= 20 drops, Layer #4= 1 Teaspoon.

Place the cake pans in the middle of the oven and bake at 350 degrees for about 25 minutes or until a toothpick is inserted and comes out clean. (**Note:** If you only have 3 cake pans, bake off the first 3 layers, allow them to cool in the pans for about 5 to 10 minutes and then turn the layers out onto a cooling rack. Take one of the pans, wash, dry, butter and flour it for the 4th layer.) Once all of the layers are baked allow them to cool in the pans for about 5 to 8 minutes, then invert the cake layers onto cooling racks so they can cool completely. Make the frosting while the layers are cooling.

White Chocolate Cream Cheese Buttercream Frosting

Melt the white chocolate in a double boiler. Once melted, allow it cool for about 10 minutes. Combine and blend the cream cheese and butter on medium speed. Mix in the vanilla extract and white chocolate. Finally, mix in the powdered sugar 1 cup at a time until fully blended.

Once the layers are completely cool, build the cake. Place 2 teaspoons of frosting in the middle of the cake plate. Center and place the darkest layer down first and top with ½ cup of frosting (**Note:** There is enough frosting in the recipe to add an additional 2 to 3 tablespoons of frosting per layer if desired.) Spread it out evenly using an offset spatula. Repeat this process making sure the colors graduate from darkest to lightest, starting from the bottom. Next, spread a very thin layer of frosting, called a crumb coat, over the entire cake. (**Note:** It's not going to look perfect. It seals in the crumbs on the cake so the outer layer of frosting goes on smooth.) Place the cake in the refrigerator for 10 to 15 minutes to set the crumb coat. Once it is set, spread an even layer of frosting over the entire cake. Allow the frosting to set at room temperature for about 20 minutes before cutting.

Additional Notes:

1. It is not recommended to store this cake under refrigeration because the frosting will tighten up and it won't be as pliable as it is when the cake is stored at room temperature in an air tight cake container. If the cake is stored under refrigeration, you will have to allow it come to room temperature, about 20 to 30 minutes, before cutting and serving.

2. Baking this cake without strawberries by choice or because they're out of season? If you choose not use the diced strawberries, the cake will still have the strawberry flavor due to the extract. In addition, the layers will be about almost 1 inch in height.

3. If you have some buttercream frosting leftover, it can be stored in an air tight container, or freezer bag, and placed in the freezer for up to 2 months. How to thaw the frosting? Place the air tight container in the refrigerator to thaw overnight. Then allow it come to room temperature. Blend it well with a hand mixer before using.

4. This cake recipe can make 28 to 32 cupcakes using a 12 cup muffin tin. Place ¼ cup of batter in each muffin cup lined with a cupcake liner and bake at 350 degrees for about 16-18 minutes or until a toothpick is inserted and comes out clean. The batter can be tinted to any shade of pink or red using red food coloring or gel food colors.