

GINGERBREAD WHOOPIE PIES WITH APPLES AND WALNUTS

Makes 12 (2½- to 3-inch) round whoopie pies

For the cakes:

2¼ cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon ground ginger
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon ground cloves
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
½ cup unsalted butter, softened
½ cup dark brown sugar, packed
⅓ cup molasses
½ cup buttermilk
1 large egg, at room temperature

For the apple compote:

2 Granny Smith apples, cored, peeled, and diced into ½-inch pieces (1½ cups diced apples)
⅔ cup water
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 teaspoons lemon juice

For the buttercream:

½ cup unsalted butter, softened
2 ¾ cups powdered sugar
2 tablespoons whole milk, plus more to adjust consistency
1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste
½ teaspoon kosher salt
⅓ cup walnuts, toasted and very finely chopped

For the cakes:

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, ground ginger, ground cinnamon, kosher salt, baking soda, baking powder, ground cloves, and ground nutmeg.

In a separate bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer, whip the butter on high speed until light and fluffy. Add the dark brown sugar and molasses, followed by the buttermilk and egg, mixing on medium-high speed until well combined.

With a rubber spatula or a wooden spoon, fold the dry ingredients into the butter mixture until just combined. Do not overmix.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and transfer to the refrigerator to chill, at least 2 hours.

To bake, preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Line 2 rimmed half-sheet trays with baking parchment.

Use a cookie scoop to portion the chilled dough onto the prepared trays in 1 ½-inch mounds, about 2–3 inches apart.

Bake for 13–15 minutes, or until the cakes spring back when touched.

Allow the cakes to cool on the tray for 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Meanwhile, prepare the apple compote.

For the apple compote:

In a medium saucepan, combine the diced apples, water, granulated sugar, vanilla bean paste, ground cinnamon, and ground nutmeg.

Simmer over medium heat, stirring periodically, until the mixture thickens and the apples have broken down, about 20 minutes. If the pan seems dry, add an additional teaspoon of water as needed.

Remove from heat and stir in the lemon juice. Set the compote aside and allow it to cool completely before assembling the whoopie pies. Meanwhile, prepare the buttercream.

For the buttercream:

In a large mixing bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer, add the butter and whip on high speed until light and fluffy.

Gradually add the powdered sugar to the butter, alternating with the milk and mixing well after each addition. Continue mixing on medium-high speed until smooth and creamy.

Mix in the vanilla bean paste and salt. If necessary, add a teaspoon of milk to adjust the consistency.

Add the chopped toasted walnuts and mix on medium-high speed until well combined.

Transfer the buttercream to a piping bag fitted with a ⅝-inch round piping tip.

To assemble:

Divide the cakes into pairs, pairing halves that are similar in size and shape.

On the flat sides of half of the cakes, pipe a generous ring of walnut buttercream around the outside edge. Fill the center of each ring with a teaspoon of the apple compote.

Sandwich with the remaining cakes, pressing down gently to join the 2 halves.

Serve and enjoy.

Gingerbread whoopie pies are best enjoyed on the day they are made. Layer leftovers between sheets of baking parchment and store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

Gingerbread Whoopie Pies with Apples and Walnuts

RECIPE AND PHOTOS BY REBECCA FREY

GROWING UP IN CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA, I relished family outings to the local market house—buzzing with sights and smells from ripe local produce and hand-twisted soft pretzels to fresh-cut French fries and sugary funnel cakes.

It was hard to know where to look—or what to eat—next. Yet somehow I always gravitated toward the whoopie pies, savoring these iconic treats from the first bite of cake to the last lick of the cellophane wrapper.

Today, whoopie pies come in unique flavors like red velvet, peanut butter, and pumpkin, but the traditional version (and the kind I remember from childhood) typically consists of a smooth, shortening-based vanilla filling sandwiched between a pair of rich chocolate cakes.

In this recipe, I've replaced the chocolate cakes with soft, spicy gingerbread. And instead of vanilla frosting, swirls of walnut buttercream surround a homemade apple compote, creating a winter-appropriate twist on a classic Pennsylvania dessert.

While these whoopie pies are decidedly *not* traditional, they do highlight two hallmarks of Pennsylvania Dutch cuisine: apples and ginger. Pennsylvania cooks have long celebrated the state's orchards, turning apples into sauce, butter, fritters, dumplings, pudding, and pie. Ginger, too, is a key ingredient, appearing in recipes for gingersnaps, "ox tongue" cookies, and gingerbread cake.

Although these whoopie pies require a bit more time than the traditional version, they're well worth the effort. The freshly baked gingerbread, fragrant roasted walnuts, and simmering spiced apples are sure to warm any home on a chilly winter afternoon. And as a bonus, the kitchen will smell absolutely *divine*.

