

## SPRING HAS SPRUNG GARDEN PARTY CAKE

### INGREDIENTS

for the cake and mini-cupcakes

4 1/2 ounces high-quality bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped  
9 tablespoons (1 stick plus 1 tablespoon) unsalted butter, room temperature  
1 cup confectioners' sugar  
6 large eggs, separated, at room temperature  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1/2 cup granulated sugar  
1 cup all-purpose flour

for the frosting and assembly

1 cup unsalted butter (2 sticks), Softened to room temperature  
3 1/2 cups confectioners (powdered) sugar  
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder  
1/2 teaspoon table salt  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
4 tablespoons milk or heavy cream  
at least 2 boxes of Mikado/Pocky stick snacks

for the decoration

1 - 1 1/2 cups green mini-M&Ms (you have to buy the whole bag and pick out the green ones)  
sugar daisies or other little sugar flowers  
sugar garden gnomes (optional)

Non-edible things you will need: 2 8 inch square cake pans (you can also use round), mini terra cotta flower pots (optional, you can also just have the cups in wrappers), green wide ribbon  
Optional: two wooden skewers, white thread, other colored thin ribbon

### DIRECTIONS

Make the cake (can be made up to 2 days ahead): Preheat oven to 400F. Create parchment paper slings for your square pans (very important as they are very difficult to remove). spray again liberally with baking spray. Line a mini-muffin pan with 4-6 liners (you will only be making a few mini-cupcakes out of the same chocolate cake batter).

In the top part of a double boiler over very hot, but not simmering, water, or in a microwave at medium power, melt the chocolate. Remove from the heat or the oven, and let stand, stirring often, until cool.

Beat the egg whites and granulated sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer on high speed just until they form soft, shiny peaks. Do not overbeat. Stir about one fourth of the beaten whites into the chocolate mixture to lighten it, then fold in the remaining whites, leaving a few visible wisps of whites. Sift half of the flour over the chocolate mixture, and fold in with a rubber spatula. Repeat with the remaining flour.

Fill your mini muffin cups with a tablespoon or so of batter. Divide the remainder between the two prepared square pans. The mini-cupcakes will only need to bake for 15-18 minutes; the cakes for 35-40 minutes or until a tooth pick inserted in the center comes out clean. (The cakes may dome in the center; this is ok.) Cool on a wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove from the pans with the slings and let cool completely.

For the frosting, cream butter for a few minutes in a mixer with the paddle attachment on medium speed. Turn off the mixer. Sift 3 cups powdered sugar and cocoa into the mixing bowl. Turn your mixer on the lowest speed until the sugar and cocoa are absorbed by the butter. Increase mixer speed to medium and add vanilla extract, salt, and milk/cream and beat for 3 minutes. If your frosting needs a more stiff consistency, add a little more sugar. If your frosting needs to be thinned out, add additional milk 1 tablespoon at a time.

Heat raspberry jam and rum in a small saucepan and stir with a whisk until very smooth.

To Assemble: Using a long serrated knife, trim the top of the cake to make it level. Cut the cakes horizontally into two equal layers. Place one cake layer plate. Brush the top of the cake layer with the raspberry glaze. Place the second cake layer on top and brush again. Repeat with the other cake (or if you want, only use 3 layers, which is what I did for the one pictured). Brush the top and sides of the cake with the remaining glaze.

First frost your mini cupcakes with a piping bag and a star tip (you won't need very much frosting for this). Decorate with the sugar daisies. Slide a few into the terra cotta mini mini-pots and set into the fridge to cool.

Using a metal offset spatula, gently frost the cake, both top and sides. It doesn't have to be particularly neat, but you do want a layer of the butter cream around the outside to act as "glue" for the Mikado/Pocky sticks. Working as efficiently as possible (you might need a second set of hands to help you out here), rim the outside of the cake with the Mikado/Pocky snacks to create the outside/fence of the "garden". Tie with a ribbon (alternatively, you can also tie with baker's twine and then tie the prettier ribbon around later). Refrigerate for a few hours to let the frosting set. Once that is done, add the "pots" (mini cupcakes) and sprinkle around "grass" (the mini-M&Ms).

Remove the cake from the refrigerator about 30 minutes before serving. Add the spring garland, if using. To serve, slice with a sharp knife dipped into hot water (note that you will need to take off the ribbon to cut the cake and there is a good chance that the M&Ms will go everywhere when you cut it).