

WHITE CHRISTMAS PEPPERMINT CAKE

SERVES 16 TO 20

OVEN TEMPERATURE 350°F/175°C

BAKING TIME 30 to 40 minutes

This cake is soft and tender with a velvety crumb, frosted with a silken white chocolate buttercream, filled and topped with a fine crunch of peppermint. My friend Joe Tully says it reminds him of Christmas morning. However, if you omit the peppermint extract and increase the vanilla extract to one tablespoon, you will have a lovely all-purpose white layer cake.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT Two 9 by 2 inch round cake pans, encircled with cake strips, bottoms coated with shortening, topped with parchment rounds, then coated with baking spray with flour

BATTER

	VOLUME	WEIGHT	
6 large egg whites, at room temperature	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup (177 ml)	6.3 ounces	180 grams
milk	$1\frac{1}{3}$ cups (315 ml), <i>divided</i>	11.3 ounces	322 grams
peppermint extract, preferably Flavorganics	2 teaspoons (10 ml)	.	.
pure vanilla extract	1 teaspoon (5 ml)	.	.
bleached cake flour (or bleached all-purpose flour)	4 cups (or $3\frac{1}{2}$ cups), sifted into the cup and leveled off	14.1 ounces	400 grams
superfine sugar	2 cups	14.1 ounces	400 grams
baking powder	2 tablespoons plus $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon	1 ounce	29 grams
fine sea salt	1 teaspoon	.	6 grams
unsalted butter (65° to 75°F/19° to 23°C)	16 tablespoons (2 sticks)	8 ounces	227 grams

PREHEAT THE OVEN Twenty minutes or longer before baking, set an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and preheat the oven to 350°F/175°C.

MIX THE LIQUID INGREDIENTS In a medium bowl, whisk the egg whites, ⅓ cup/79 ml/2.8 ounces/81 grams of the milk, the peppermint extract, and vanilla just until lightly combined.

MAKE THE BATTER In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the flat beater, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt on low speed for 30 seconds. Add the butter and the remaining milk. Mix on low speed until the dry ingredients are moistened. Raise the speed to medium and beat for 1½ minutes. Scrape down the sides of the bowl.

Starting on medium-low speed, gradually add the egg mixture to the batter in three parts, beating on medium speed for 20 seconds after each addition to incorporate the ingredients and strengthen the structure. Scrape down the sides of the bowl. Using a large silicone spatula, scrape the batter into the prepared pans and smooth the surfaces evenly with a small offset spatula. Each pan will be half full (27.2 ounces/770 grams in each).

BAKE THE CAKES Bake for 30 to 40 minutes, or until golden brown, a wire cake tester inserted into the centers comes out clean, and the cakes spring back when pressed lightly in the centers. The cakes should start to shrink from the sides of the pans only after removal from the oven.

COOL AND UNMOLD THE CAKES Let the cakes cool in the pans on a wire rack for 10 minutes. Run a small metal spatula between the sides of the pans and the cakes, pressing firmly against the pans, and invert the cakes onto wire racks that have been lightly coated with nonstick cooking spray. Cool completely upside down. This will help flatten the slight dome.

WHITE WHITE CHOCOLATE BUTTERCREAM

MAKES 6 CUPS/34 OUNCES/962 GRAMS

WHITE CHOCOLATE CUSTARD BASE

MAKES 3 CUPS/28 OUNCES/800 GRAMS

	VOLUME	WEIGHT	
white chocolate containing cocoa butter, preferably Valrhona Opalys, chopped	.	13.2 ounces	375 grams
unsalted butter (65° to 75°F/19° to 23°C)	13 tablespoons (1 stick plus 5 tablespoons)	6.6 ounces	188 grams
5 large eggs, at room temperature	1 cup (237 ml)	8.8 ounces	250 grams

MAKE THE WHITE CHOCOLATE CUSTARD BASE In the top of a double boiler set over barely simmering water (do not let the bottom of the container touch the water), melt together the chocolate and butter, stirring often until smooth and creamy.

Whisk the eggs lightly to break them up and then whisk them into the melted chocolate until incorporated. With a silicone spatula, continue stirring, being sure to scrape the mixture from the bottom of the container to prevent overcooking. Stir until an instant-read thermometer reads 160°F/71°C. The mixture will have thickened slightly. Remove it from the heat source. (If any lumps have formed, press them through a strainer.) Transfer the mixture to a bowl. Cover it tightly and refrigerate for about 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes until cool to the touch. (An instant-read thermometer should read 65° to 70°F/19° to 21°C.) To speed cooling, place the bowl in an ice water bath (see page 538) and stir often.

COMPLETED WHITE WHITE CHOCOLATE BUTTERCREAM

	VOLUME	WEIGHT	
unsalted butter (65° to 75°F/ 19° to 23°C)	12½ tablespoons (1 stick plus 4½ tablespoons)	6.3 ounces	178 grams
White Chocolate Custard Base	3 cups	28 ounces	800 grams
pure vanilla extract	1¼ teaspoons (6 ml)	.	.

COMPLETE THE BUTTERCREAM In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk beater, beat the butter on medium-low speed until creamy, about 30 seconds.

Gradually beat the custard base into the butter, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed. Raise the speed to medium-high and beat for 2 minutes until stiff peaks form when the beater is raised.

Cover and set aside for 1½ to 2 hours, or until the mixture is slightly thickened and spongy. It should be no warmer than 70°F/21°C. If necessary, place the bowl in an ice water bath for a few minutes, stirring constantly. Beat on medium-high speed until smooth, light, and creamy. Beat in the vanilla.

PEPPERMINT TOPPING

	VOLUME	WEIGHT	
peppermint sticks	.	3.5 ounces	100 grams

MAKE THE PEPPERMINT TOPPING Have ready a coarse-mesh strainer suspended over a medium bowl.

Place 1 or 2 peppermint sticks in a freezer-weight plastic bag. With a hammer or mallet, lightly break up the stick(s) into shards no larger than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Empty them into the strainer and stir to sift the powder-fine pieces into the bowl.

COMPOSE THE CAKE Cut each layer in half horizontally.

Spread a little buttercream on a cardboard round or serving plate and place one layer, rounded top side down. If using the serving plate, slide a few wide strips of parchment under the cake to keep the rim of the plate clean. Spread the cake with about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup/4 ounces/113 grams of the buttercream. Evenly sprinkle $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons of the peppermint pieces over the buttercream. Continue with the remaining layers, saving the bottom of one of them to use for the top of the cake so that it is perfectly level and crumb free. If the buttercream starts to become spongy, whisk it until smooth and creamy.

Frost the top and sides of the cake with the remaining buttercream. Refrigerate for about 30 minutes to set the buttercream. Sprinkle the powder-fine peppermint over the top of the cake and then sprinkle evenly with the remaining peppermint pieces. If using the parchment strips, slowly slide them out from under the cake.

Serve at room temperature.

STORE Airtight: room temperature, 1 day; refrigerated, 3 days; frozen, 2 months.