

Banana Crunch Cake with Milk Chocolate Buttercream

Makes one 8-inch round cake (3 layers), serving 10-12. You will need three 8-inch cake pans, an 8-inch cardboard cake circle, a petal piping tip (Wilton #104) and an offset spatula. A revolving cake decorating stand would be helpful. I highly recommend using [cake strips](#) when baking these cakes. They result in cakes that are moist and perfectly level, without cracks or crusty edges.

This recipe was inspired by the Mini Banana Crunch Cakes served at Cake Monkey Bakery in Los Angeles, California. The buttercream recipe is from Stella Parks at [seriouseats.com](#). I learned how to do the wavy ruffle piping technique from Tessa Huff's new book, [Icing on the Cake](#). You can watch a video of me piping the ruffles on my blog post.

I highly recommend making this cake over 2 days. On day one, make the cake layers and the toffee crunch. Once cake layers have cooled, wrap well in plastic and refrigerate. On day two, make buttercream and assemble.

Cake:

170 grams ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) unsalted butter
320 grams ($2\frac{2}{3}$) cups cake flour
1½ teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1½ teaspoon baking soda
480 grams ($2\frac{1}{4}$ cups) firmly packed light brown sugar
3 large eggs
510 grams ripe peeled bananas (about 5 bananas)
170 grams ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup plus 2 Tablespoons) sour cream (not light)
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste

Toffee:

198 grams (1 cup) granulated sugar
164 grams ($1\frac{1}{2}$ cup) light corn syrup
120 grams ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) heavy cream
227 grams (1 cup) unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch cubes

Swiss Meringue Milk Chocolate Buttercream:

284 grams egg whites, (about 10 egg whites) it's okay to go a tad over.
284 grams granulated sugar ($1\frac{1}{4}$ cups plus 3 Tablespoons)
½ teaspoon kosher salt
907 grams unsalted butter (4 cups), cut into 1" chunks and softened for about 30 minutes at room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste
226 grams (1 cups) milk chocolate, finely chopped
142 grams ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) bittersweet or semi-sweet chocolate, finely chopped

1. **Make cake:** Set oven rack in middle position. Preheat oven to 325°F. Spray three 8-inch round cake pans with non-stick cooking spray; line the bottoms with parchment paper rounds. Spray the paper. If using cake strips, wet cake strips and wrap them around the outside of each cake pan.
2. Heat the butter in a medium saucepan until browned. You will see tiny rust-colored specks float to the top and the butter may become foamy when it is ready. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly.
3. Whisk together the cake flour, baking powder, salt and baking soda in a medium bowl and set aside. Add the brown sugar and eggs to the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and mix on medium speed for 30 seconds. Whisk the brown butter,

bananas, sour cream and vanilla together in a medium bowl, then add to the egg mixture and mix until just combined. Add the dry ingredients and mix on low speed until just combined.

4. Divide batter evenly between three prepared cake pans; using an off-set spatula, spread batter to pan walls and smooth tops. Arrange pans at least 3 inches from the oven walls and 2 inches apart.
5. Bake until thin skewer or toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 25-30 minutes. Let cakes rest in pans for 3 minutes. Loosen from sides of pans with a knife, if necessary, and invert onto wire racks. Reinvert onto additional wire racks. Let cool completely, about 1½ hours.
6. **Make Toffee:** Keep the oven temperature at 325°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Combine the sugar, corn syrup and cream in a heavy-bottomed saucepan. Bring the mixture to a boil over medium heat without stirring. Add the butter and begin to stir until the caramel turns the color of peanut butter.
7. Pour immediately onto the prepared baking sheet and bake until the toffee turns a deep amber color and spreads thinly on the pan, 10 to 12 minutes. Let cool, then chop into tiny pieces that will be easy to chew.
8. **Make buttercream:** Combine the egg whites, sugar and salt together in the bowl of your stand mixer. Set the bowl over a pan of water and turn the heat on medium low. You don't need the water to even simmer, you just want it hot enough to steam, since steam is what actually heats the whites.
9. Whisk frequently to prevent an egg white omelet forming on the sides, but continual mixing isn't necessary. Aim to get the mixture to at least a 145°F for food safety reasons but, reaching 150°F would make for a nice margin of error. If your egg whites are at room temperature, this won't take very long, maybe just a few minutes. Whites straight from the fridge will take longer.
10. When the mixture is sufficiently hot, remove from the heat, place bowl on stand mixer and use the whisk attachment to whip on medium high speed until the mixture has doubled in volume and turned snowy white. Continue whipping until the meringue is cool. Use your hands to feel the bowl itself, rather than simply testing the temperature of the meringue. You want it to feel perfectly cool to the touch with no trace of warmth.
11. While the egg white/sugar mixture is beating, combine chopped milk and bittersweet chocolates in a microwave safe bowl and heat on medium power for 2 minutes. Stir and heat for a further one minute on medium power. Remove from microwave, stir until completely melted. Set aside.
12. Replace whisk attachment with paddle attachment. Turn the mixer down to medium-low and begin adding in the butter, one chunk at a time. If you didn't let your meringue cool enough, this is when you'll really regret it. By the time you've added all the butter, you may need to scrape down the bowl to fully incorporate any butter or meringue that's stuck at the sides. At one point it will look like the buttercream has curdled, but just keep beating and it will come together. Add vanilla extract or paste.
13. Turn mixer down to low speed and pour in all the melted chocolate at once. Turn up speed to medium high and keep mixing until the colour of the buttercream is uniform.
14. **Assemble Cake:** Put first cake layer onto a cardboard cake circle or plate with a little buttercream underneath so it doesn't slide. Put a bit of buttercream on the bottom of the cardboard cake circle and "glue it" to the cake turntable.

15. Spread about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of the buttercream onto the first layer with an offset spatula. Scatter about $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of the chopped toffee over the smoothed buttercream. Add the second layer of cake and repeat with buttercream and toffee. Top with final cake layer and then cover the entire cake with a very thin layer of buttercream. This will be your crumb coat. Refrigerate or freeze for 20 minutes until the buttercream has hardened.
16. If you want to decorate the cake with the wavy ruffles, as I have done, fill a piping bag, fitted with petal tip (Wilton #104), with buttercream. Hold the piping bag nearly parallel to the side of the cake, with the opening of the tip facing down and the narrowed side pointing away from the cake. Starting at the bottom of the cake, pipe soft waves up the side of the cake, keeping even pressure on the piping bag. Release the pressure on the bag at the top of the cake before pulling the tip away. Pipe waves around the entire cake, loosely following the curves of the previous wave as you pipe the next. Smooth the top edges with a small offset spatula by gently pulling the tips of the waves toward the center of the cake. Make a decorative border of chopped toffee on top of the cake.

Any leftover cake will keep, wrapped in plastic, in the fridge for up to 4 days.