Cannoli Cake

Sweet ricotta cheese filling separates three moist yellow cake layers in this Italian pastry-inspired cake. It's frosted with a duo of mascarpone buttercream and rich chocolate ganache.

PREP TIME	COOK TIME	TOTAL TIME
1 hr	28 mins	1 hr 28 mins

COURSE	CUISINE	SERVINGS
Dessert	Italian	14

EQUIPMENT

- 8-inch cake pans

INGREDIENTS

Yellow butter cake

- 3 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 6 large egg yolks
- 1 1/2 cups whole milk

Ricotta filling and cannoli

- 32 oz. whole milk ricotta cheese
- 2/3 cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1 1/2 teaspoons orange zest
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

- 1 1/2 cups mini semisweet chocolate chips, divided
- 6 ready-made mini cannoli shells

Mascarpone buttercream

- 3/4 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 3 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 8 oz. mascarpone cheese softened
- 1/4 teaspoon fine grain salt
- Heavy cream if needed

Chocolate Ganache Frosting

- 2 cups semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup sliced almonds

INSTRUCTIONS

Yellow butter cake

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Coat three 8-inch cake pans with flour-based baking spray (or grease and flour); set aside.
2. In a large mixing bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder and salt. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter on medium speed until smooth and creamy. Add the sugar and mix on medium-high until the butter is light and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes. Scrape down the bowl.
3. With the mixer running on low, add the vanilla and egg yolks, one at a time. Scrape down the bowl.
4. Add the flour mixture in three batches while mixing on low speed, alternating with the milk; begin and end with flour. Mix briefly on medium speed until no streaks of flour remain.
5. Evenly divide the batter between the prepared pans. Bake for 25-28 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cakes comes out clean. Let the cakes cool in the pans for 10 minutes before removing the cakes from their pans. Transfer to wire racks to cool.

Ricotta filling and cannoli

1. Place the ricotta cheese in a cheese cloth-lined sieve. Tie the loose ends of the cheesecloth together with kitchen twine and place the sieve in a large bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and place it in the refrigerator overnight. The next day discard the liquid (whey) in the bottom of the bowl.
2. Turn the drained ricotta out into a large mixing bowl. Add the powdered sugar and mix well with a hand mixer. Mix in the orange zest and vanilla. Fold in 1 cup of the mini chips using a rubber spatula; place the remaining 1/2 cup of chips in a small dish.

3. Remove about 1 cup of the ricotta to a piping bag with a 1/2-inch hole snipped in the end. Pipe the filling into the cannoli shells. Dip each end of the cannoli into the dish of mini chips. If you have leftover filling in the piping bag, squeeze it back into the bowl. Refrigerate the filled cannoli while you prepare the rest of the cake.

Mascarpone buttercream

1. In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whip attachment, beat the butter on high speed until creamy. Mix in the powdered sugar a little at a time until thick. Add the vanilla, mascarpone cheese and salt. Beat at high speed until well combined, about 30 seconds. Do not over beat. If mixture is too thick to spread, mix in heavy cream a tablespoon at a time. If too lax, refrigerate until it firms.
2. Fill and frost: Place a cake layer on a cake board or serving plate. Top with half of the ricotta filling and spread evenly. Top with a second cake layer; spread remaining ricotta filling on evenly. Top with the third cake layer. Cover the outside of the cake with the mascarpone buttercream. Refrigerate while you make the ganache.

Chocolate ganache frosting

1. In a large microwave-safe bowl, add the semisweet chips and heavy cream. Heat the mixture in the microwave at 100% power for 1:00 to 1:30 seconds, or until the cream is hot but not boiling. Let the mixture stand for 1 minute and then whisk until a consistent shiny ganache is achieved. Refrigerate until the mixture is thick and easily spreadable like buttercream. Transfer the ganache to a piping bag with a 1/2-inch plain round piping tip.
2. Decorate: Pipe chocolate ganache around the bottom half of the cake in an undulating pattern, creating a smooth rising and falling outline (almost like drawing the outline of a mountain range). Fill in the outline with more ganache; smooth using a bench scraper or offset spatula. Immediately pat sliced almonds onto the ganache.
3. Place the six filled cannoli on top of the cake radiating from the center so that the edges of each cannoli touch each other in the top center of the cake (a cannoli flower!). Transfer remaining ganache to a piping bag fitted with a large star tip. Pipe swirls of ganache between the cannoli on top of the cake. Sprinkle leftover sliced almonds and mini chips on top of the piped ganache. Refrigerate until ready to serve.
4. Serve slices slightly chilled or at room temperature. Cover leftovers with plastic wrap and store in the refrigerator.

NOTES

The ricotta cheese for the filling needs to drain overnight before using, so plan ahead.