

Buttermilk Chocolate-Nut Loaf

1½ cups flour
7 tablespoons cocoa
½ teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
⅔ cup sugar
5 ounces marzipan
4 large room-temperature eggs

⅔ cup buttermilk
1 teaspoon almond extract
½ cup toasted hazelnuts
½ cup blanched, toasted almonds
½ cup pistachios
3 ounces bittersweet chocolate
13 tablespoons unsalted butter

Be sure the buttermilk and eggs are at room temperature.

Line the bottom of a 9- by 5-inch loaf pan with wax paper, then thoroughly butter the pan. If you have 8½-by 4½-inch loaf pans, you will need to pour some of the batter into a muffin pan or small ramekin.

Whisk together the flour, cocoa, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in a large bowl.

Melt the chocolate in a pan placed over simmering water. Set aside to cool. Melt the butter and set aside to cool.

If you can't find already roasted and skinned hazelnuts, place raw hazelnuts on a pan in a 350° oven for about 12-15 minutes, stirring occasionally. When well toasted, wrap them in a towel or paper towels, and rub them vigorously to remove as much of the skins as possible.

Place the blanched almonds (either slivered or whole) on a pan in 350° oven and toast 10-12 minutes until lightly browned. Chop all three nuts coarsely and set aside. If you are using slivered almonds, you need not chop them.

Center a rack in the middle of the oven, and stack two baking sheets, placing them on the oven rack. Preheat the oven to 350°.

Put the sugar and marzipan in a mixer, using the paddle attachment. Beat at medium speed until the marzipan breaks up and blends with the sugar.

Add the eggs one at a time, beating for 2 minutes after each addition.

Replace the paddle attachment with the whisk attachment. Beat the mixture at high speed for 10 minutes, until it forms an emulsion and the whisk leaves tracks. On low speed, add the cooled, melted chocolate to the mixture until combined.

Stir the almond extract into the buttermilk. Continuing at low speed, add the buttermilk until combined. Then add the dry ingredients one cup at a time until well combined, and homogenous.

Remove the bowl from the mixer, and fold in the nuts with a rubber spatula.

Gently, but thoroughly, fold in the cooled, melted butter 2 tablespoons at a time, making sure it is thoroughly incorporated without over mixing.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan, and bake the cake for 60-65 minutes. Do not over bake or the cake will dry out. A tester inserted into the cake may not come out completely clean. Remove the cake from the oven, and let it cool in the pan for 10 minutes before unmolding. When unmolded, peel off the wax paper, and allow the cake to cool to room temperature, then wrap in a double layer of plastic wrap.

The cake is delicious on its own, but is also wonderful served with a scoop of vanilla or pistachio ice cream.