CoCoNut Bliss CaKe

I’ve had a longtime love affair with coconut candy. Almond Joys and Mounds bars are always the first to disappear from my Halloween stash. (*I use the present tense because at my age, I proudly continue to collect Halloween candy.*) This recipe is a deconstruction of the Almond Joy, reassembled in the best possible way. The coconut cake is inspired by my aunt Edna’s incredibly light and flawless coconut cake. At 91, Edna is the eldest of my mother’s 15 siblings (*Yes, 15!*), and her coconut cake is the thing dreams are made of. Her frosting is simple, made with fresh coconut, sugar and egg whites—but cracking into a coconut is no joke. While aunt Edna never seems to have trouble with coconuts, I’ve nearly lost fingers trying to pry one open. So to preserve our appendages, we’ll just stick to store-bought coconut flakes for this recipe. One bite of this cake, coated in a decadent chocolate fudge sauce and adorned in almonds, and you’ll be hooked. It’s the Almond Joy, all grown up.

Makes one 8-inch layer cake

Coconut Cake

2½ cups cake flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

5 egg whites

¾ cup (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened

1½ cups granulated sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 can (13.5 ounces) unsweetened coconut milk

Dark-chocolate-covered almonds, for garnish

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease three 8-inch round cake pans, line the bottoms with parchment paper, grease and set aside.

In a medium bowl, sift or whisk together the cake flour, baking powder and salt and set aside.

Beat the egg whites in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment until stiff peaks form. Scoop the egg whites into a bowl and set aside. Wipe the mixing bowl clean.

Beat the butter and sugar together in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment until light and fluffy, then add the vanilla.

With the mixer on low, add the flour mixture, alternating with the coconut milk until the batter is completely mixed and smooth. Use a spatula to fold in the egg whites, carefully stirring until no white streaks remain.

Divide the batter evenly among cake pans and bake for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center of a cake comes out clean. Cool completely in the pans.

Coconut Swiss

Meringue Frosting

1 cup granulated sugar

4 egg whites

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cubed and softened

2 cups coconut flakes, for assembly

Chocolate Fudge Coating

10 ounces high-quality semisweet chocolate,

chips or chopped

4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter

1 tablespoon light corn syrup

In a stand mixer bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water, whisk the sugar and egg whites until combined.

Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture is very warm, about 3 minutes.

Move the bowl to the stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, and whip on high for 5 minutes, or until cooled and stiff peaks form.

Switch from the whisk to the paddle attachment. With the mixer on medium, add in the butter, one cube at a time.

Once incorporated, continue to beat until the frosting thickens. Don’t be discouraged if it looks runny. Continue to beat the frosting and after a few minutes it will magically turn from a seemingly curdled soup to a thick and silky frosting.

Combine the chocolate, butter and corn syrup into a heat-safe bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water.

Stir until chocolate is just melted, then remove from heat and continue to stir until smooth. Set aside to cool slightly.

To Assemble:

Invert the pans to release the cakes. If the tops of the cakes are rounded, use a serrated knife to level them.

Place one layer on a cake stand, then use an offset spatula to frost the top of the cake with about ¹⁄3 cup of the Swiss Meringue. Sprinkle ½ cup of the coconut flakes on top of the frosting. Repeat with a second cake layer, frosting and another ½ cup of coconut flakes.

Top with the final cake layer. Create a thin crumb coat (pg. 33) of frosting around the cake that will seal in all the crumbs and make a smooth base for the remaining frosting. Refrigerate for about 20 minutes.

Use an offset spatula to spread on the remaining frosting. The trick to icing a cake is to remove frosting from the cake and not to add it. So start by applying a large amount of frosting on the top of the cake and spread the excess towards the edges and over the sides.

Frost the sides by holding the spatula upright with the edge against the cake. Slowly rotate the cake to create a seamless layer of frosting. Place the excess frosting back in the bowl and repeat until the entire cake is smooth.

Press the remaining 1 cup of coconut flakes around the base of the cake.

Carefully drizzle the Chocolate Fudge Coating over the top of the cake, letting it drip over the sides. Garnish with a few chocolate-covered almonds on top.

Short on time?

You can bake the cakes in advance and freeze them for later. If cooled completely and wrapped tightly, the unfrosted cakes will keep in the freezer for about

three weeks.

Freezing a cake that’s already been frosted? Not a good idea.