

PISTACHIO CUPCAKES

Common cakes at CHamoru party tables include carrot, red velvet, and pistachio cake. Pistachio cake has a subtle flavor, but if you make this cake ahead of time, freeze it unfrosted, thaw then decorate – it's so yummy. It wasn't my go-to dessert as a kid on Guam, but as an adult, it has grown on me. This wonderful combination of pistachio cake and creamy frosting, omg! The sliced strawberries are not the norm for CHamorus, but I find it enhances the flavor, and adds a bright burst to balance the richness of the cake.

The typical pistachio cake uses pistachio pudding. However, I couldn't really taste the pistachio so I tried a different approach. I've only baked this recipe in cupcake form. Next time I make it, I'll use a 9 x 13. If I remember back to my cake decorating days, one box of cake mix is not enough for a 9 x 13 pan – and of course, it will take longer to bake. Cupcakes make it easier to use some measure of control when eating – because these pistachio cupcakes are weirdly satisfying.

These taste so much better if you freeze them for a week. The flavor becomes more intense and they will be incredibly moist.

When you are ready to frost the cupcakes, be sure to thaw the Cool-Whip in the fridge overnight. Thaw the cream cheese on the counter in a cool, not warm, room.

CAKE

INGREDIENTS

Set 1

1 box Duncan Hines yellow cake mix (Duncan Hines is best, and do not get the white flavor!)

1 cup water

3 large eggs, room temperature

1/3 cup vegetable oil

Set 2

1 cup pistachio butter, store-bought or homemade

½ cup shelled pistachios, measured then roughly chopped

½ teaspoon baking powder

½ to 1 teaspoon green food coloring

Tools: *cupcake muffin pans, paper cupcake liners, electric beater, large bowl, rubber spatula*

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Line muffin tins with cupcake paper liners.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the baking mix, baking powder, eggs, oil, pistachio butter, ½ cup chopped pistachios, and the food coloring. Beat for 30 seconds on low then scrape the bowl. Beat for two minutes on medium.

Fill each liner only halfway for small cupcakes. This batter expands quite a bit. If you fill two-thirds the way up, the cupcakes will have a flat cap at the top instead of mounding in the middle. Bake 16 to 18 minutes then check for

doneness. Bake another minute or two if toothpick does not come out clean. A few crumbs are OK, as long as it's not wet batter.

Once done, cool cupcakes on a wire rack.

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FROSTING

INGREDIENTS

Set 1

16-ounce tub of Cool-Whip, extra creamy if available, cold in the fridge (do not keep it at room temp on the counter)

8-ounce block of real Philadelphia cream cheese, soft, room temperature

½ cup powdered sugar

Tools: *medium bowl, electric beater, rubber spatula, sifter*

DIRECTIONS

If your room is 70 degrees or cooler, you may have to gently warm the cream cheese in a microwaveable plate for 5 seconds. It should spread easily on the plate with a rubber spatula. If not, warm for another 5 seconds. Transfer to the medium bowl. Beat the cream cheese with an electric beater to ensure it is soft and well whipped.

Add the Cool-Whip and beat to combine.

Sift the powdered sugar into the bowl and incorporate.

Frost the cupcakes once they are completely cooled. If you froze the cupcake, you can frost them while they are frozen.

TOPPING

*All are optional

Set 1

Roughly ground or finely chopped pistachios

Whole or roughly chopped pistachios

Sliced strawberries

Pistachio cakes on Guam way back when where simply frosted. But you know, it's nice to jazz things up a bit. Use a whole pistachio in the middle. Maybe you prefer a sprinkle of finely chopped or ground pistachios. And if you like strawberries, they go reallllly good with these pistachio cupcakes.