

Cherry Season Cake

It's cherry season and the lovely ruby red fruits are a beautiful festive reminder that Christmas is not far off. A big bowl of cherries makes a wonderful addition to the Christmas lunch table that is particularly enjoyed by children and anyone not up to tackling the Christmas pudding but cherries can also take centre stage in many ways. A simple compote of pitted fresh cherries can be chilled overnight and served with ice cream as a great dessert for a hot Christmas day or the compote can be folded into mascarpone for a trifle or whipped cream for a filled sponge cake. I thought a cake would be nice to try out. For my seasonal cherry sponge I decided on a white chocolate ganache marbled with a little of the reduced cherry juices obtained after poaching and some fresh cherries with stems attached to complete the decoration. The red and white of this fresh cherry cake really says Christmas to me.

Cherry Season Sponge Cake

serves 12

For The Cherry Compote

- 4-5 cups of pitted cherries (make sure you check that the pips are removed as you pit them)
- 1/2 cup sugar

Heat the pitted cherries and sugar gently, stirring occasionally until the sugar dissolves.

Cook gently for 10 minutes and then pour the cherries into a sieve, draining the liquid into a bowl. Return the liquid to the saucepan and reduce over the heat by about half, cool and place in a separate container to the cherries and refrigerate both overnight.

For The Sponge Cake

- 12 eggs, separated
- pinch salt
- 12 tbs sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 12 tbs
- cake flour *

Butter and line two 28 cm sponge pans with baking paper

Preheat the fan forced oven to 150°C.

Using an electric beater beat the egg whites with a pinch of salt. When the eggs start to foam, slowly add the sugar and beat until the peaks are firm but the very top still droops. Add the egg yolks and vanilla with a slow speed until mixed through. Fold in the sifted flour with a large spatula with a cutting motion to maintain air in the batter. Divide the batter over the two sponge pans and bake for 15-18 minutes.

Cool in the pan for 5 minutes and then remove to a wire rack to cool completely.

For The Ganache

- 170 g white chocolate couverture buttons
- 150 ml thickened cream
- 100 ml approximately reduced cherry juices

Place the white chocolate button in a mixing bowl. Heat the cream in a small saucepan until bubble start to form around the edges. Pour the hot cream over the white chocolate buttons. Stir until melted.

To Assemble The Cake

- 450 ml thickened cream
- cherry compote
- whole cherries with stems for decoration

Whip the cream until stiff. Fold in the chilled cherry compote and spread over the base of one sponge cake. Top with the remaining sponge cake. When the ganache has cooled but still fluid dribble on some reduced cherry juices and pour over the cake. Top with whole cherries. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

*Cake Flour: remove 2 tbs from 1 cup of plain flour and replace it with 2 tbs cornflour. Sift to mix well.