

Mexican Chocolate Skillet Brownies – Comfort du Jour

INGREDIENTS

1 box brownie mix (I love Ghirardelli, but use your favorite), plus mixing ingredients listed on the box
1 Tbsp. dark cocoa powder (Mine is from King Arthur Baking, but Hershey Special Dark would be OK)
1 tsp. espresso powder*, optional (deepens the chocolate, but does not add coffee flavor)
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp. *pure* ground chipotle* (see notes)
1 tsp. real vanilla extract
1/3 cup Ghirardelli semi-sweet chocolate chips
A few pinches of coarse sea salt or kosher salt
Butter, for greasing the skillet or brownie pan*

GANACHE

1/2 cup heavy cream
4 oz. Ghirardelli semi-sweet chocolate chips*
1 Tbsp. Kahlua or Patron XO Café Dark liqueur, optional

*NOTES

Espresso powder is available in specialty markets or online, or you could also substitute a quality brand of instant coffee, such as Starbucks Via. The ingredient is not necessary and does not add coffee flavor, but intensifies the chocolate in baked goods.

Chipotle, which is smoked jalapeno, is especially nice with chocolate. You could also use up to the same amount of pure cayenne powder, which is spicier, or pure ancho powder, which is milder and more fruity. Do not use what is generically labeled as “chili powder,” as these random blends usually also include salt, garlic, oregano and other spices you wouldn’t want in brownies.

My decision to use a 10.25” cast-iron skillet presented a few other adjustments, of slightly different distribution of the brownie batter from my usual baking dish. Also, the cast iron is heavy and retains more heat than my 8 x 8 glass dish. I have adjusted the baking time accordingly in my instructions, but please consider your mix recommendations as well as your baking vessel.

According to my digital kitchen scale, a level 1/2 cup of chocolate chips was only three ounces, which falls short of “equal parts” with the cream. If you don’t have a scale to weigh them, measure out 1/2 cup, then pile on as many extra chips as you can without spilling, and you should have about four ounces.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to the temperature recommended for your brownie mix (325° F, for mine), and position rack to the center of the oven. Generously butter your baking vessel, whether it is a glass dish or cast-iron skillet.

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2. Combine dry brownie mix, dark cocoa, espresso powder, cinnamon and chipotle powder.
3. Whisk together the liquid ingredients and add the vanilla to them. I usually do this in a glass measuring cup for easy pouring into the dry mixture.
4. Make a well in the dry mixture and pour in the wet ingredients all at once. Stir thoroughly, but just until combined. Fold in additional chocolate chips, if you're using them (of course you are).
5. To bake in the cast iron skillet, place buttered skillet over medium-high heat for a couple of minutes. This will give the brownies a jump start for even baking. Pour brownie batter into the skillet (or buttered baking dish). Sprinkle with coarse salt, about a half teaspoon or so over the entire surface.
6. Bake brownies according to mix instructions, but be mindful that the skillet brownies will finish faster. My box mix suggests 45-50 minutes in a regular pan, but my skillet brownies were done in 34 minutes. The skillet retains more heat, so slightly underbaked is better than overbaked.
7. Cool brownies in the skillet until ready to serve. Once cooled, I recommend transferring them to another dish (to protect the seasoning on your skillet).

MAKE THE GANACHE:

Place a small, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-low heat. Add cream and heat until steaming, but not boiling. Pour cream over chocolate pieces in a glass bowl, and let it sit at least five minutes, allowing chocolate to melt. Whisk the mixture until thoroughly combined and creamy. Stir or whisk in liqueur.

TO SERVE:

Slice the brownies into the shape and size desired, and spoon the warm ganache over each portion. Leftover ganache may be chilled, and then re-warmed in a bowl placed over steaming or simmering water. You may also microwave the ganache, about 15 seconds at a time, until it stirs smooth.

Alternatively, you may pour the warm ganache all over the cooled brownies and allow it to cool to room temperature. With this method, the ganache will set up like an icing.