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Memories of mugs, puppies and cake

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Sometimes you just need a little something sweet. For me, it's usually late at night when I find myself stumbling into the kitchen, stubbing my toes on dog toys and kitchen chairs in search of just a bite or two, but nothing that will make me feel like I've ruined my diet. In those moments of weakness, the last thing I want is a whole cake staring me in the face. Because believe me, I could do some damage to that puppy.

Mug Cake to the rescue. God bless the dear soul who came up with the idea for the sweet deliciousness of Mug Cakes. There really ought to be a Nobel Prize for that sort of thing. Or at least superhero outfit with a giant "M.C." on the front. And a cape.

A SWEET SURPRISE

Mama and I had just come in from the back yard where we had been looking to see if any of her flowers were coming up. It was early spring and still a little chilly out, but we were hopeful. We didn't find any flowers, but the Robins were out in force, and we did find several spots where green leafy shoots were beginning to break through the soft, wet soil.

One of Mama's favorite spring flowers were grape hyacinths. She liked crocuses, too, not so much for how they looked but because she knew that when they came up winter was finally over. We had daffodil and jonquil bulbs, too, but more often than not they would just begin to bloom and then we would get a little cold snap that would kill them out.

All of my sisters were in school, and Daddy, who worked midnights back then, was sleeping. I would be starting school in the fall, so there were only a few more months for Mama and I to spend on our own together. Mama thought that I was to be their last child, so it was going to be hard for her to let me go. It was still a few years away before she and Daddy would be blessed with the final surprise of my one and only brother.

My friend and neighbor, Donna, would be starting school with me, and since she was also the baby of her family our mothers shared the same mixed feelings about letting go. Now that the weather was warming up they often stood on either side of the flower bed that separated our yards and talked, coffee in one hand and cigarettes in the other. While they talked, Donna and I busied ourselves chasing chickens or swinging on the big rocking horse swing that Daddy had hung on our giant willow tree. Eventually Donna's mother turned back to the laundry that was flapping on the line behind her, and Mama called for me to come and get something to eat.

Once back in the house, Mama put a Jim Reeves album on our little record player and headed to the kitchen to pack Daddy's lunch — a few slices of old fashioned thick cut bologna, a hunk of cheese and several saltine crackers, all wrapped in waxed paper. Some days it would be a liverwurst sandwich with a thick coating of mustard, or a tin of sardines and some homemade pickles.

I climbed behind the sofa — my favorite hiding spot — and sang "Make The World Go Away" with as much passion as an almost five-year-old can muster. When the familiar "thunk" of a car door buffeted the side of the house I raced to the door thinking that it was my sister, Marti, who was already married with children of her own.

Mama came from the kitchen and opened the big front door which was too heavy for me, but Marti's big blue convertible was not in the driveway. Instead, a



Laura Hunt Angel photo

Loaded with chocolate, these little cakes are just right for late night cocoa cravings.

stout little lady was making her way from the driveway to her house. As the lady reached the porch, Mama opened the screen door with a smile and let our visitor in. She took off her silky head scarf and greeted Mama and me with a big smile.

"Hattie!" I said, jumping around on the furniture like a thin-legged frog. I was usually skittish of anyone except family, but Hattie was closer in size to me than any grown-up I'd ever known and not in the least intimidating. She raised poodles and had a head full of wiry curls that looked a lot like the fur of her little dogs. Mama took Hattie's jacket and told her to come on in the kitchen for a cup of coffee. I hopped over to the record player and turned it off.

Hattie sat down at the table while Mama poured out the coffee, but then Hattie asked Mama if she had a tea cup handy. Mama said she did, and reached up in the cupboard to get one. Hattie took the empty cup, set it on the table and beckoned me to come close. As I did, she reached into her big purse and pulled out a little brown bundle. She carefully set the bundle in the tea cup, and then I could see what it was: the tiniest puppy I had ever seen.

It peered at me with sweet dark eyes and then curled right up in the tea cup. Hattie whispered that it was okay if I wanted to pet it, so I very gently reached out and stroked its little head with two fingers. Hattie said that it was called a tea cup poodle, and that even when it was grown it would be very small.

When Daddy woke up for work he found us in the kitchen cooing over the puppy. Mama was pouring fresh coffee into his thermos, and when he spied the little puppy in the cup he smiled and told Mama that it looked like we needed to get some mouse traps.

THE RECIPES

If you haven't yet tried a Mug Cake you really don't know what you're missing. Since these are microwave recipes, the most important thing to remember is not overcook them or you will end up with a dry, spongy and unsatisfying mess. I usually spray a little non-stick in the mug for easy clean-up. These little desserts for one are perfect for late night sweet tooth attacks or unexpected company, and



Laura Hunt Angel photo

Break out the ice cream and prepare for applause when you serve up warm berry cobbler Mug Cake.

almost as sweet as a puppy in a cup.

FLOURLESS CHOCOLATE MUG CAKES

Dense and fudgy, this little darlin' makes enough for two so that you can share. Or not. I won't tell a soul.

½ cup chocolate chips (I used bittersweet)

2 tablespoons butter

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

1 egg

2 tablespoons sugar

1 ½ teaspoons cocoa

Extra sugar for garnish, optional

Set aside 2 tablespoons of the chocolate chips. Put the remaining chocolate chips in a microwavable cup or bowl and melt them by microwaving at 30 second intervals until you can stir them into a smooth consistency. This took me about a minute and a half, but the time will vary depending on microwave wattage. Stir in the butter and vanilla. In a separate bowl or cup, whisk the egg with a fork; add the sugar and continue to whisk until the mixture is pale yellow and thoroughly blended. Fold the melted chocolate into the eggs, then blend in the cocoa powder. Add the remaining chocolate chips and divide the batter between 2 mugs. Microwave both mugs at the same time on high, about 1 ½ minute or until the tops are just set. If you happen to have any vanilla ice cream in your freezer, it goes real good with these. Serves 2.

CINNAMON

ROLL MUG CAKE

Serve this with a cup of coffee or tea for a great quick breakfast treat on busy weekends.

2 tablespoons applesauce (cinnamon or regular)

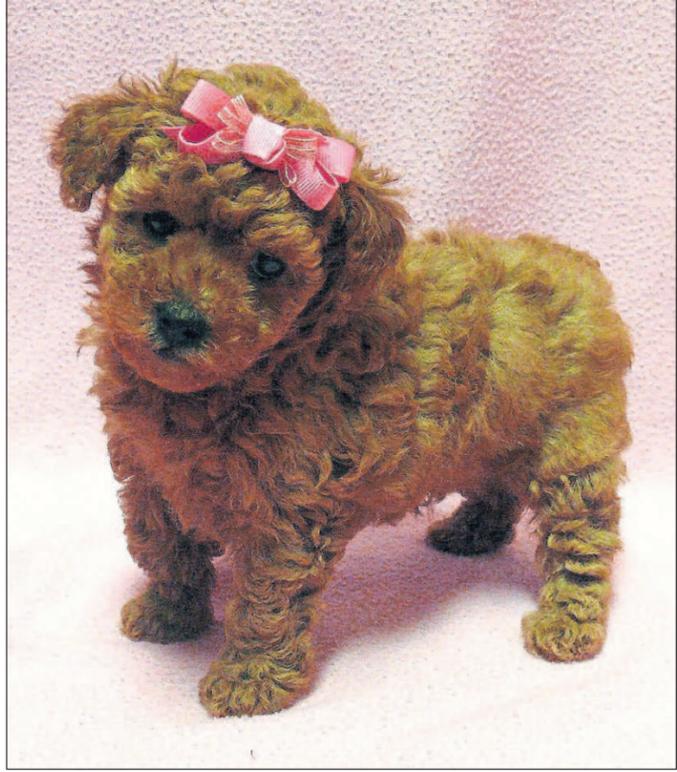
1 tablespoon oil

2 tablespoons milk

¼ teaspoon vanilla extract

5 tablespoons flour

1 ½ tablespoons brown sugar



Bijou Puppies photos

When fully grown, this sweet as sugar teacup poodle will weigh in at roughly 4½ pounds.

¾ teaspoon cinnamon

Dash salt

Icing

1 tablespoon softened cream cheese

2 tablespoons powdered sugar

1 teaspoon milk

Combine all except icing ingredients in a mug and stir with a fork until thoroughly blended.

Microwave on high 1 minute. If necessary, continue microwaving at 15 second intervals until done but do not overcook. Combine icing ingredients and drizzle over cake.

BERRY COBBLER

IN A MUG

Break out the vanilla ice cream again for this one because, well, you just can't have cobbler without ice cream. I'm pretty sure it's illegal, at least in the state of Kentucky. I chose blackberries, but for variety use whatever berries are in season. This is Hubby Chuck's fav.

¾ cup your choice of berries, fresh or frozen

¼ cup sugar, or to taste

½ cup flour (I used whole wheat)

1 tablespoon sugar

½ teaspoon baking powder

1 tablespoon butter

2 tablespoons milk

Chop the berries, if necessary. Stir together the berries and ¼ cup sugar and place in a mug. In a separate bowl, blend together the flour, sugar

and baking powder, then add the butter and work it into the with a fork or the back of a spoon until crumbly. Add the milk and stir just to combine; spoon the dough onto the berries. Microwave on high for 1 ½ - 2 minutes, or until dough is still slightly moist but springs back when lightly touched. Let cool for a few minutes; top with ice cream and serve.

SUPER LEMONY MUG CAKE

This bright, zingy cake is like a little burst of springtime in a mug. For even more lemony goodness, top it with a dollop of lemon curd before drizzling with the icing.

3 tablespoons flour

¼ teaspoon baking powder

Dash salt

1 egg

3 tablespoons sugar

2 tablespoons oil

1 teaspoon lemon zest

1 ½ tablespoons lemon juice

Icing

½ cup powdered sugar

1 ½ teaspoon lemon juice

Combine the flour, baking powder and salt in a mug. Whisk in the egg, sugar, oil, lemon zest and juice until the batter is smooth. Microwave on high for 1 ½ - 2 minutes, or until the cake is risen and the center is just set. Do not overcook. Stir together icing ingredients, drizzle on top of warm or cold cake.