Cupcake Baking Mistake Yields A 'Eureka' Solution

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It all started with a mistake ---more a careless disregard for the principles of baking.

I was making chocolate cup-cakes for a birthday dinner. Being a bit lazy and a bit clumsy with the gloppy batter, I overfilled the muffin tin cups. Everyone who bakes cupcakes knows you don't do that. But I did. And the batter overran the cups, creating ugly cupcakes with huge, spreading mushroom heads — which broke off right where the tops met the bodies when I tried to get them out of the pan

Still, they were delicious, even unfrosted, thanks to the recipe from baking guru Nick Malgieri's "Bake!" (Kyle Books, \$29.95). We ate a few to mark the birthday, leaving me with more than a dozen ugly (but delicious), tops-comingoff cupcakes.

What to do with them? Frosting them seemed silly. What about transforming them into something else? Like a trifle? Not quite right. Too fussy. But then, inspired by a dessert the next night at Fat Rice in Chicago, which layered groundup shortbread in a parfait, I had the answer: cupcake parfaits.

Layering homemade chocolate pudding, whipped cream and the decapitated cupcakes transformed a mistake into a new house favorite. They were a big hit the next night at our weekly "Top Chef" watching dinner. And have been requested by friends again. There's something about playing with the ubiquitous but still loved cupcake that brings out the kid in us, makes us sit up in delight at the idea. And makes us dig in.

CHOCOLATE CUPCAKE PARFAITS

Makes: 6 parfaits Note: We found the parfaits taste better if assembled one day ahead.

Prep Whip 1 cup whipping cream, with 1 to 2 tablespoons sugar, to soft peaks.

Cut tops off 6 cupcakes, slicing them crosswise just below where the top meets the body.

Choose 6 glasses that are wide enough to accommodate the cupcake tops. Instead of traditional parfait glasses, use a straight-sided 10- to 12-ounce drinking glass.

Laver: Plop about 1/4 cup chocolate pudding in the bottom of each glass.

Nestle the cupcake bottoms into the pudding, pushing in gently so the pudding comes partway up the sides of the cupcakes.

Dollop each with a generous portion of whipped cream, pushing it down around the sides of the cupcake and covering its top.

Dollop on a half-inch layer of pudding. Gently top with the cupcake

tops. Finish with a dollop each of

pudding and whipping cream.

- mixer, but the batter can certainly be mixed with a hand mixer.
- Ingredients: 2 cups flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 sticks (12 tablespoons)
- unsalted butter, softened
- 1 1/2 cups sugar 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 3 large eggs, at room
- mperature
- 3 ounces unsweetened chocolate, melted, cooled
- 3/4 cup whole milk, at room
- temperature
 - Directions:

1. Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Line muffin pans with 18-20 paper

liners. Whisk the flour, baking powder and salt together in a bowl; set aside.

2. Combine the butter and sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Beat on low speed until well mixed. Increase the speed to medium; beat until mixture is very light and pale in color, about 5 minutes. Beat in the vanilla.

3. Beat in the eggs one at a time, beating smooth after each addition. Beat in the melted chocolate. Scrape the bowl and beater with a spatula.

4. Restart the mixer on low. Add a quarter of the flour mixture; beat until absorbed. Increase speed to

medium-low; beat in 1/4 cup milk. 5. Repeat step 4, including the change of speed, two more times.

6. Stop and scrape; beat in the remaining flour mixture. Scrape again. Increase the speed to medium; beat 3 minutes.

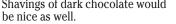
7. Divide the batter among the lined pans, filling the cups to the top. Bake, 15-20 minutes. Cool before proceeding with parfait. (Enjoy remaining cupcakes as you

like.) Nutrition information: Per serving: 206 calories, 10 g fat, 6 g saturated fat, 47 mg cholesterol, 27 g carbohydrates, 3 g protein, 128 mg sodium, 1 g fiber.



Parfaits made from over-filled cupcake tops.





If assembling the parfaits a day ahead, finish the top with the pudding, but don't add the final dollop of whipped cream. (Cover and chill the whipped cream.) Cover the parfaits and chill. When ready to serve, re-fluff the whipped cream a bit with a whisk. Dollop the whipped cream onto the parfaits and serve.

DEEP CHOCOLATE PUDDING

Prep: 15 minutes Cook: 18 minutes Chill: 30 minutes Servings: 4 Note: Adapted from Foodandwine.com. Ingredients: 1 cup each: heavy cream, whole

milk 1 egg, lightly beaten 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons

sugar 2 tablespoons each: unsweetened cocoa powder, cornstarch 1/8 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon unsalted butter

3 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped

Directions:

1. Whisk the cream, milk and egg in a medium saucepan. In a bowl, whisk together the sugar, cocoa, cornstarch and salt; add mixture to the saucepan. Heat to a boil, whisking constantly, over moderately high heat. Strain the pudding into a bowl. Stir in the butter and chocolate until melted.

2. Pour pudding into a glass bowl to cool. Press plastic wrap directly on the surface of the pudding; refrigerate until chilled, about 30 minutes.

Nutrition information: Per serving: 521 calories, 41 g fat, 25 g saturated fat, 153 mg cholesterol, 39 g carbohydrates, 8 g protein, 141 mg sodium, 3 g fiber.

CHOCOLATE CUPCAKES

Prep: 20 minutes Cook: 18 minutes Makes: 18 to 20 cupcakes

Note: Author Nick Malgieri outlines how to turn any of his cake recipes in "Bake!" into cupcakes. This recipe applies those guidelines to his chocolate butter cake. Malgieri advises coating the top of the pans with cooking spray or butter so that the cupcake tops don't stick if they spread (and, remember, we want them to spread for the parfaits to get broad tops). The directions are for a stand

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