

Pumpkin Muffins With Candied Pepitas and Mascarpone Frosting

These warm, earthy cupcakes are soft and tender and lightly scented with clove and cinnamon. We bring them out every October when we start to see pumpkins at the grocery store and our thoughts turn to Thanksgiving and all of the pumpkin pies we'll soon be baking at Flour. They are a scrumptious way to ease into the season. The candied pepitas, or pumpkin seeds, add a bit of sweet crunch to a not-too-sweet cupcake.

Makes 36 mini cupcakes

Ingredients:

Candied pepitas
3/4 cup (170 grams) pepitas (pumpkin seeds)
1 egg white
1/4 cup (50 grams) sugar

Pumpkin Muffins

3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks/170 grams) unsalted butter
1 cups (200 grams) granulated sugar
3 tablespoons unsulfured light or dark molasses
4 eggs
3/4 cup (180 grams) fresh orange juice (about 3 oranges)
1 can (16 ounces/454 grams) pumpkin puree
3 cups (420 grams) unbleached all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves

Mascarpone Cream

16 oz Mascarpone
8 oz sour cream
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
5 ounce confectioners sugar
1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice

Instructions:

To make the cake

1. To make the candied pepitas. Line a small tray with parchment paper. In a small bowl, stir together the pepitas, egg white, and sugar to make a loose slurry. Pour the seed mixture onto the prepared tray and leave out, uncovered, to dry overnight. The next day, using your fingers, break apart the pepitas into separate pieces. (The pepitas can be prepared up to 1 week in advance and stored in an airtight container at room temperature.)
2. Position a rack in the center of the oven, and heat the oven to 350 degrees F. butter a standard 24-cup mini muffin tin, coat with nonstick cooking spray, or line with paper liners.
3. Using a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or a hand-held mixer), cream together the butter, sugar, and molasses on medium speed for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the mixture is light and fluffy. Stop the mixer and scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl with a rubber spatula.
4. On low speed, add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition to combine the eggs and butter-sugar mixture thoroughly. Scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl once more. On low speed, add the orange juice and pumpkin and beat until combined. The mixture will look somewhat curdled. Don't worry. It will all come together once you mix in the flour.
5. In a large bowl, stir together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and cloves until well mixed. Dump the egg mixture into the dry ingredients and fold carefully just until the dry and wet ingredients are well combined. (The batter can be made up to 2 days ahead and stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator.)
6. Spoon the batter into the prepared cupcake cups, dividing it evenly. Sprinkle the tops evenly with the candied pepitas.
7. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the cupcakes are golden brown on top and spring back when pressed in the middle with a fingertip. Let cool in the pan on a wire rack for 20 minutes, then remove the cupcakes from the pan.

To make the frosting (about 3.5 cups)

1. Beat the mascarpone cheese and sour cream on medium speed until smooth.
2. Add pumpkin pie spice, lemon juice and confectioners' sugar. Beat for two minutes, or until well mixed.

Chef's Note:

The cupcakes taste best on the day they are baked, but they can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 days. If you keep them for longer than 1 day, refresh them in a 300 degree F. oven for 4 to 5 minutes. Or, you can freeze them, wrapped tightly in plastic wrap, for up to 1 week; reheat, directly from the freezer, in a 300 degree F. oven for 8 to 10 minutes.

Adapted from Joanne Chang (*Flour: Spectacular Recipes from Boston's Flour Bakery + Cafe* by Joanne Chang)