

- Is there a small present you can give to yourself this holiday season? Perhaps it's 5 minutes of yoga before bed, taking a bubble bath on the weekend, or dedicating a few minutes to spending quality time with your partner, child, or pet each night to share the day's highlights. Or maybe it's a seasonal indulgence, like a beautiful slice of fudgy chocolate cake?

Here's to a warm, wonderful, peaceful time of year aglow with the abundant gifts of the season. Now for that chocolate cake...

Fudgy Chocolate Chestnut Cake

(Gluten-free, Grain-free, Dairy-free, Egg-free, Soy-free, Vegetarian, Vegan)

This is my favorite wintertime cake. It's rich, dense, fudgy, and heaven on a spoon. As a bonus, it's a great make-ahead cake and the chocolaty goodness intensifies the next day. Since it's gluten-free, dairy-free, soy-free, egg-free, grain-free, and vegan, it works no matter who is coming for dessert! As a special bonus, it's unbelievably easy to make. Chestnuts are elegant, delicious, and pair wonderfully with chocolate. They are easy to find during the holiday months, either in pouches or in jars, and increasingly maple sugar can be found in most grocery stores as well. The cake is yummy warm, but I love it even more chilled.

Serves 8-10

1/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon melted coconut oil
 2 rounded cups roasted and shelled chestnuts
 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
 8-9 pitted Medjool dates (about 1 cup of pitted dates)
 3 1/2 ounces good quality unsweetened chocolate, melted
 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
 1/2 teaspoon mint extract, almond extract, or orange extract, optional (choose 1, not all 3)
 Pinch of salt
 1 1/3 cup maple sugar

Put the coconut oil, chestnuts, and vanilla in a food processor and process for 1-2 minutes. Add the dates to the food processor and process for another 1-2 minutes. Add in the rest of the ingredients except the maple sugar and pulse until combined, scraping down the sides of the food processor as necessary. Add the maple sugar last and pulse just until there is a uniform batter. The batter will be extremely thick.

Spoon the batter into a greased 8-inch springform pan and smooth with a spatula. Bake at 325°F for 35-40 minutes or until browned on the edges and firm on top. Allow to cool. Serve slices drizzled with Cashew Creme Sauce.

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