Chocolate Guinness Cupcakes

The perfect way to celebrate St Patrick's Day in style, these luxurious cupcakes are easy to make and will be a hit at any party – Irish or otherwise!

I first came across this recipe over ten years ago, when I wanted to be a professional cake designer and open a shop in Paris. In the end I decided that a career in baking wasn't for me, as I prefer making cakes for fun – but I still make these Guinness cupcakes at every opportunity! I made them countless times when I was working at British Council Paris, and I'm sure that's the reason I became such good friends with many of my wonderful colleagues. They've also been a big success in my new life at British Council Taiwan!

Here is my recipe, with some tips and advice that should guarantee you a fun and successful baking experience!

Ingredients for 24 cupcakes

For the Cakes	For the Topping
250 millilitres Guinness (or other beer – non-alcoholic is also fine) 250 grams unsalted butter 75 grams cocoa powder 400 grams caster sugar 150 millilitres sour cream or plain yoghurt 3 large eggs 1 tablespoon vanilla extract 275 grams plain flour 2½ teaspoons bicarbonate of soda	150 grams unsalted butter (at room temperature) 150 grams cream cheese (in the fridge) 300g icing sugar ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Equipment

- A muffin tin. These normally have 12 holes, and each hole is quite deep. You can also use a cupcake tin, which is smaller, but remember the cupcakes will cook more quickly!
- Muffin or cupcake liners. These are little paper cases in which the cupcakes are cooked.
- A large saucepan
- A hand-held whisk
- A large mixing bowl
- An electric whisk
- A spatula
- A piping bag and nozzle

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan), and line your muffin tin with paper cases. You will have enough cake mix to fill two tins, so you can do them both at the same time if you have two tins and a big oven!
2. Pour the Guinness into a large wide saucepan, add the butter in slices, and heat very gently until the butter's melted. Stir it occasionally with the whisk. Don't let it boil! As soon as the butter has melted, take it off the heat and let it cool slightly.
3. Whisk in the cocoa powder and sugar. I recommend doing this in stages, or you'll get them all over your kitchen!
4. Beat the sour cream together with the eggs and vanilla in a small bowl.
5. Pour the cream, vanilla and eggs into pan and stir it in gently. If your mixture is too hot, it will cook the eggs – so make sure it's cooled down! It shouldn't be cold, but it should be cool enough for you to touch the pan with your hand.
6. Whisk in the flour and bicarbonate of soda. Again, do this in stages, one tablespoon at a time, and make sure it's fully mixed in before you add the next tablespoon. If the flour is lumpy, make sure you sift it first.
7. When all the flour is mixed in, the mixture will be very runny. That's normal!
8. Fill each cupcake case about ¾ full. The easiest way to do this is to pour some of the mixture into a measuring jug, and then pour it gently into the cases.
9. Put them in the oven and leave them for 20-25 minutes. When the time is up, take them out of the oven and press one gently. If it's cooked, it will be spongy and will spring back into shape when you take your hand away. If not, give them another 3 minutes, then check again.
10. Let the cupcakes cool completely before you ice them. If you only have one muffin tin, take the cupcakes out of it when they are cool enough to touch, let the tin cool down, and then make the second batch.
11. To make the icing, make sure your butter is soft, but not liquid. Put it into a large mixing bowl and beat it with an electric whisk until it is smooth. Add the icing sugar, one tablespoon at a time, and mix it in very gently or you'll get covered in sugar!
12. When all the icing sugar has been added, the frosting should be very stiff. Add the cream cheese straight from the fridge, and beat it in. Keep mixing until the frosting is smooth and holds its shape well. Finally, add the vanilla extract and beat it in.
13. If the frosting seems too solid, add some milk. Mix it in one tablespoon at a time, until you reach a good consistency – not too thick, and not too liquid.
14. Using a spatula, put the frosting into a piping bag with a nozzle of your choice. Working in a spiral from the outside of the cupcake to the middle, pipe a generous helping of frosting onto each cupcake.
15. Keep the cupcakes in the fridge, but make sure you bring them up to room temperature before eating them. They will be fine to eat for up to a week, but I never manage to save them for that long!

This recipe is for 24 cupcakes, but you can also make one large cake using a deep 23cm tin. If you do, don't forget to lower the oven temperature to 160°C (fan), and bake the cake for 45-60 minutes.