

CHOCOLATE-CHERRY BROWNIES

Makes 24 brownies

1½ cups (6 ounces) dried cherries, chopped
¼ cup plus ⅓ cup water
1 teaspoon almond extract
2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped fine
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces
6 tablespoons vegetable oil
⅓ cup (1 ounce) Dutch-processed cocoa powder
2 large eggs plus 2 large yolks
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2¼ cups (15¾ ounces) sugar
¾ teaspoon salt
1¾ cups (8¾ ounces) all-purpose flour

Why This Recipe Works Chocolate and cherries are a common pairing—think Black Forest cake or cherry cordials. We wanted to find the best way to add bright cherry flavor to chocolaty brownies. The biggest challenge was incorporating the moist cherries without ruining the texture of the brownies. First we tried sprinkling chopped fresh cherries with sugar and leaving them to drain off some of their liquid before stirring them into the batter. Unfortunately, even after draining, the fresh cherry bits made the brownies wet. Dried cherries added a concentrated hit of fruit flavor and solved the moisture issue, but their texture was leathery. To plump and soften the dried cherries we rehydrated them with water in the microwave, but this dulled their flavor. Replacing the water with juice or liquor made the cherries too sweet or medicinal-tasting. The solution was to add a teaspoon of potent almond extract to the brew. This made sense: Almonds share similar flavor compounds with stone fruits—including cherries. Once stirred into the batter (with their liquid), these cherries gave the brownies a deep, fruity complexity. Either sweetened or unsweetened dried cherries can be used in this recipe.

1 Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Make foil sling for 13 by 9-inch baking pan by folding 2 long sheets of aluminum foil; first sheet should be 13 inches wide and second sheet should be 9 inches wide. Lay sheets of foil in pan perpendicular to each other, with extra foil hanging over edges of pan. Push foil into corners and up sides of pan, smoothing foil flush to pan. Grease foil.

2 Combine cherries, ¼ cup water, and almond extract in small bowl. Microwave, covered, until hot, about 1 minute. Let stand, covered, until cherries have softened, about 5 minutes. Microwave chocolate and butter in large bowl at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally, until melted, about 45 seconds. Whisk in oil, cocoa, and remaining ⅓ cup water. (Mixture may look curdled.)

3 Whisk eggs and yolks and vanilla into chocolate mixture until smooth and homogeneous. Whisk in sugar and salt until fully incorporated. Using rubber spatula, stir in flour until just combined. Stir in softened cherries and their liquid.

4 Transfer batter to prepared pan and smooth top. Bake until slightly puffed and toothpick inserted in center comes out with few moist crumbs attached, 25 to 30 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.

5 Let brownies cool in pan on wire rack for 1 hour. Using foil overhang, remove brownies from pan. Transfer to wire rack and let cool completely, about 1 hour. Cut into 24 pieces before serving.