

## Chocolate hazelnut brownie cake

One of my favorite—if not my absolute favorite—American dessert is brownies. In this sinfully luscious version, the brownie is transformed into a thin round cake with an intense chocolate flavor. At serving time, I pile on whipped cream flavored with orange zest and Grand Marnier.

✦ 8 servings

Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Line an 8- or 9-inch tart or round cake pan with aluminum foil and butter the foil with  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon of the butter.

Break the chocolate into small pieces and put it into a microwavable glass bowl with the remaining butter. Microwave for about 1 minute on high, then leave undisturbed in the microwave oven for about 5 minutes. Reheat again on high for 1 minute. (If the chocolate is heated for 2 or 3 consecutive minutes in the microwave, it tends to scorch.) Remove from the microwave and stir until smooth.

Scatter the hazelnuts on a cookie sheet and toast for 5 to 6 minutes, or until they are lightly browned (there's no need to remove the skins). Cool for a few minutes, then transfer to a plastic bag and crush into very small pieces with a rolling pin or a small pan.

Put the sugars, eggs, and vanilla into a large bowl and beat with a whisk until smooth. Add the nuts and melted chocolate and fold in gently with a rubber spatula until well incorporated. Pour into the tart pan and bake for about 20 minutes, or until the cake is just set but still wet in the center. (A toothpick inserted in the center will come out with wet crumbs.) Cool to room temperature on a rack. (The cake will set as it cools.)

*For the garnish:* Put all the ingredients except the mint in a mixing bowl and whip gently with a whisk or electric mixer until the cream holds firm peaks.

Pile the cream on top of the cake, garnish with the mint, and cut into wedges to serve.

### Variation

For more conventional brownies, bake the batter in an 8-inch square pan and cut into squares for serving.

### Cake

- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 6 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup shelled hazelnuts
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup light brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

### Garnish

- 1 cup heavy cream
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon Grand Marnier
- 1 teaspoon grated orange zest
- 5 or 6 fresh mint leaves

### ◀◀ MAKE AHEAD

The cake can be made up to 24 hours ahead and refrigerated. Set it out at least 1 hour before serving to achieve the proper soft texture, or reheat it for a few minutes in a low oven.