

WEST INDIES SPICED CHOCOLATE DATE CAKE

Yield: 10-12 servings

INGREDIENTS

1 1/4 cups water
15 ounces whole Medjool dates (about 22), pitted,
3 tablespoons brandy
2 tablespoons strong-brewed coffee
1 tablespoon fresh thyme, chopped fine
4 tablespoons unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
Pinch of ground cinnamon
Large Pinch of ground Allspice
1 1/2 sticks (12 tablespoons) unsalted butter, room temperature, plus more for pan
3/4 cup packed dark-brown sugar
4 large eggs
1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
5 ounces bittersweet chocolate (preferably at least 61 percent cacao), coarsely chopped

DIRECTIONS

1. For the cake: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 9-by-3-inch round cake pan. Line with buttered parchment paper.
2. Bring water to a boil in a saucepan. Meanwhile, combine dates, brandy, coffee, and 2 tablespoons cocoa in a heatproof bowl. Stir in boiling water. Let cool, stirring occasionally. Puree cooled date mixture in a food processor (you should have about 2 1/2 cups). Place 3/4 cup puree in a small bowl, and press plastic wrap directly on surface; reserve. Place remaining puree in a large bowl.
3. Whisk flour, salt, cinnamon, allspice and remaining 2 tablespoons cocoa in a bowl.
4. Beat butter and dark-brown sugar with a mixer on medium speed until fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating after each addition (batter will look curdled).
5. Stir baking soda into reserved uncovered date puree. On low speed, beat flour mixture into egg mixture in 2 additions, alternating with the date mixture. Beat in chocolate. Transfer batter to prepared pan, and smooth top.
6. Bake until a toothpick inserted into center of cake comes out clean, about 1 hour. Let cool in pan on a wire rack for 30 minutes. Run a knife around edge of pan to loosen, and invert cake onto rack. Remove parchment, turn cake right side up, and let cool completely. (Cake can be wrapped in plastic and stored at room temperature for up to 2 days or frozen for 2 months).

Serve as dessert with whipped cream and a bottle of Purple Star 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon.

Cheers.

Chef Big John Caudill