

Spider Cupcakes

Favorite Halloween cupcake alert! Kids and parents alike will practically inhale these cupcakes, which are as adorable to look at as they are scrumptious to eat. Imagine rich devil's food cake, smeared with buttercream frosting, and topped with a crunchy chocolate treat in the shape of a spider. Don't worry, no real creepy-crawlies in this recipe!

What You Need:

- 24 silver or foil liners for cupcake pans
- 2 cupcake pans (12 cupcakes each)
- 1 package (18.25 ounces) plain devil's food cake mix
- 2 tablespoons Dutch-process cocoa powder
- 1 1/3 cups buttermilk
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 3 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 3 cups confectioner's sugar
- 1 cup butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1-2 tablespoons whipping cream
- 6 drops yellow food coloring
- 2 drops red food coloring
- 24 Chocolate Spiders (recipe follows)
- Tiny round decorating candies (optional)
- Brown decorating gel (optional)



What You Do:

1. Place a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 350°F. Line 24 cupcake cups with silver paper liners. Set the pans aside.
2. Prepare the cupcake batter: Place the cake mix, cocoa powder, buttermilk, oil, eggs, and vanilla extract in a large mixing bowl. Blend with an electric mixer on low speed for 30 seconds. Stop the machine and scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula. Increase the mixer speed to medium and beat 2 minutes more, scraping down the sides again if needed. Spoon or scoop a heaping 1/4 cup batter into each lined cupcake cup, filling it two thirds of the way full. (You will get between 22 and 24 cupcakes; remove any empty liners from the pan and fill the unfilled cupcake spots with a small amount of water.) Place the pans in the oven.
3. Bake the cupcakes until they spring back when lightly pressed with your finger, 16 to 20 minutes. Remove the pans from the oven and place them on wire racks to cool for 5 minutes. Run a dinner knife around the edges of the cupcake liners, lift the cupcakes up from the bottoms of the cups using the end of the knife, and pick them out of the cups carefully with your fingertips. Place them on a wire rack to cool completely, 30 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, prepare the Buttercream Frosting. In a standing mixer fitted with a whisk, mix together sugar and butter. Mix on low speed until well blended and then increase speed to medium and beat for another 3 minutes. Add vanilla and cream and continue to beat on medium speed for 1 minute more, adding more cream if needed for spreading consistency.
5. Place 1/4 cup of the frosting in a plastic sandwich bag and set aside to reserve a small amount of it to pipe on each spider for its eyes. Add the yellow and red food coloring to the remaining frosting in the bowl. Blend well so the frosting is evenly orange. Place a heaping tablespoon of frosting on

each cupcake and swirl to spread it out with a short metal spatula or a spoon, taking care to cover the tops completely.

6. Garnish the cupcakes: Cut off a small piece from one of the bottom corners of the plastic bag holding the frosting. You can pipe spiders directly onto the cupcakes using frosting or you can decorate the cupcakes with homemade chocolate spiders (see recipe below). If you decorate your cupcakes with the chocolate spiders, pipe two eyes on each of the spiders. Place a small round decorating candy in the center of each eye, if desired. Place a spider on top of each cupcake. There will be 6 extra spiders for additional platter garnish or simply to enjoy. If you wish, pipe a web on the platter using brown decorating gel. The cupcakes are ready to serve.

Keep Them Fresh!

Store these cupcakes, uncovered or in a cake saver, at room temperature for up to 2 days or in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Or freeze the unfrosted and undecorated cupcakes in a cake saver for up to 6 months. Thaw the cupcakes overnight in the refrigerator before frosting, decorating, and serving.

The Cupcake Doctor Says...

Here's something to remember when you're making orange-colored frosting: Use drops of yellow and red food coloring in a 3 to 1 ratio, adding for example, 6 drops yellow and 2 drops red.

More Ideas...

Spooky Graveyard Cupcakes:

Bake any cupcake you like and frost with a stiff chocolate frosting. With a pastry bag fitted with a small round tip, pipe the letters "RIP" onto miniature Mint Milano cookies with orange decorating frosting (see the facing page, step 4). Stand a cookie up in each cupcake to resemble a headstone. Arrange the cupcakes on a platter decorated with Chocolate Spiders and an imitation spider-web, found at party stores (or pipe one using brown decorating gel).

Chocolate Spiders:

You can make these spiders up to two days before you bake the cupcakes. The six extras make wonderful platter decorations or sweet treats by themselves.

- 1 1/4 cups chow mein noodles
- 2 1/2 cups semisweet chocolate chips
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1/2 cup confectioners' sugar
- 1 cup crispy rice cereal

1. Line a baking sheet with waxed paper and set aside.
2. Measure out 3/4 of a cup chow mein noodles and break them into small pieces. Break the remaining noodles into 2-inch pieces. These will be the spiders' legs. Set the noodles aside in separate groupings.
3. Combine the chocolate chips and milk in a medium-size saucepan over low heat, stirring frequently, until the chocolate has melted and the mixture is smooth, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the confectioners' sugar, cereal, and the small chow mein noodle pieces until blended. Line a baking sheet with waxed paper. Drop the chocolate mixture by tablespoons in a slightly oblong shape (the body of the spider) onto the prepared baking sheet. You will have about 30 bodies, about 2 inches in size. Immediately insert the noodle legs into the spider bodies, 4 on one side and 4 on the opposite side. Space them evenly apart. Place the baking sheet in the refrigerator and chill the spiders until hardened, 30 to 40 minutes.

4. Once chilled, remove them from the waxed paper by pushing up from the underside of the waxed paper.

Keep Them Fresh!

Store the spiders in a plastic storage container at room temperature for up to 2 days.

Excerpted from "Cupcakes: From the Cake Mix Doctor" by Anne Byrn. (Workman, New York, Copyright 2005).

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