

ROASTED WHITE CHOCOLATE BROWNIES WITH STRAWBERRY-BALSAMIC SWIRL

Makes 24 small brownies

Every year, my partner, A.J., and I go to a black-tie benefit for our local Meals on Wheels nonprofit organization. It's a stellar fund-raising affair with food and wine from top chefs and vintners in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the thing I look forward to most is the desserts. Not only are the best local pastry chefs showcasing their top sweet treats, but the flavor combinations and inspirations are ridiculous! After tasting a dessert that used roasted white chocolate in it, I knew that I had to create something similar at home. Making a brownie out of the caramelized white chocolate* results in bars with a deep, sweet flavor that are a cross between a brownie and a blondie. Just make sure to use actual white chocolate (check the ingredients; cocoa butter should be listed) and not white chocolate chips or cheap white chocolate (which uses vegetable oil in place of the cocoa butter). Those don't melt or caramelize well.

BROWNIE BATTER

1 2/3 cups (10 ounces or 285 g) chopped white chocolate (in about 1/4-inch chunks)

3/4 cup (170 g or 11/2 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature

3/4 cup (150 g) granulated sugar

3/4 cup (165 g) packed dark brown sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

3/4 teaspoon kosher salt

3 large eggs

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 1/4 cups (315 g) all-purpose flour

STRAWBERRY-BALSAMIC SWIRL

1 cup (5 1/2 ounces or 160 g) chopped strawberries (in about 1/2-inch chunks)

1 tablespoon granulated sugar

1 teaspoon cornstarch

1 tablespoon cold water

2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar

ROAST THE WHITE CHOCOLATE

Preheat the oven to 300°F. Spread the white chocolate on a rimmed baking sheet and bake for about 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and stir with a clean spatula until the browned chocolate at the edges is evenly mixed with the uncooked white chocolate in the center. Once completely stirred, the white chocolate should be the color of dark peanut butter. If it isn't, continue to bake in 5-minute increments to darken it. Watch the white chocolate closely once it starts to brown, as it can burn pretty fast. Let cool on the baking sheet while you make the brownie batter.

MAKE THE BROWNIE BATTER

Lightly coat a 9 x 13-inch metal baking pan with cooking spray and then line it with parchment paper, with 2 inches of the paper overhanging the edges of the pan. Increase the oven temperature to 350°F.

Place the butter and both sugars in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Beat together on medium speed until light and creamy, about 2 minutes. Add the vanilla and salt and beat to incorporate. Add the eggs one at a time, beating after each egg to incorporate completely and scraping down the sides and bottom of the bowl before adding the next one. Add the oil and beat to incorporate. Scrape the roasted white chocolate into the bowl (it may have hardened and gotten a little grainy, but don't worry about that) and mix it in. Add the flour and mix on low speed until absorbed. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan.

MAKE THE STRAWBERRY-BAL SAMIC SWIRL

Place the strawberries and sugar in a small saucepan over medium heat. Cook, stirring frequently with a wooden spoon and smashing the berries, until the strawberries release their juice and fall apart, 10 to 12 minutes. Stir the cornstarch into the water and then drizzle it into the strawberries, continuing to stir and cook for a minute or two until the mixture has thickened into a jam. Continue cooking for about 2 more minutes, stirring constantly, then remove from the heat. Stir in the balsamic vinegar. Drop generous tablespoons of the strawberry swirl over the brownie batter and then use a butter knife or chopstick to swirl them together. Don't overmix; just gently pull the strawberry swirl here and there and pull some brownie batter over the strawberry swirl as well.

Bake until the brownie is golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 25 to 30 minutes. Let cool completely on a wire rack, then remove the brownies by grabbing the sides of the parchment paper and pulling directly up. Transfer the entire slab of brownies to a cutting board. Cut and serve.

**The magic of roasted white and milk chocolate*

Too many chocolate snobs dismiss white and milk chocolates as one-dimensional and too sweet, choosing dark chocolate with high cacao percentages. They clearly have not tasted roasted white and milk chocolates. Roasting these sweeter chocolates in the oven caramelizes the cocoa butter fats, creating complex flavors reminiscent of buttery caramel, toffee, butterscotch, and dulce de leche (the caramelized milk sauce popular in South America). Roasting white chocolate for baking is easy (just toss it into a 300°F oven for 10 to 15 minutes, or at lower temperature like 250°F for 20 to 30 minutes if you want a smoother end result). Milk chocolate requires longer in the oven (20 to 30 minutes at 300°F, or longer at lower temperatures). Either can be used in place of dark chocolate in recipes to create

something closer to a caramel or blondie bar with chocolate undertones. Roasted or caramelized white chocolate has become so popular that some upscale professional chocolate companies like Valrhona are even selling commercial versions of it now.

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