Bittersweet Berry Bliss Cupcakes
Each cupcake is carefully crafted into a rich chocolate and Guinness base with a dense, dark chocolate ganache at its center. Atop the cake resides a raspberries and cream frosting, garnished with a delicate white chocolate lattice and candy pearl. These cupcakes are much easier to make than they look! I highly encourage beginners to give it a try. The cupcake batter and frosting alone still make a tasty combo if you’re short on time. (From the kitchen of Michelle Clay)

Ingredients:

**Cupcake Batter**
1 cup Guinness Draught or Double Stout -Coffee, soda, or milk may also be used
1 cup (2 sticks) butter, at room temperature
¾ cup cocoa powder
2 cups all-purpose flour
2 cups granulated sugar
1 ½ tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. table salt (omit if using salted butter)
2 large eggs, at room temperature
2/3 cup full-fat sour cream

**Dark Chocolate Ganache**
12 oz. dark chocolate chips
1 cup heavy cream
3 Tbsp. butter

**White Chocolate Topper**
Block of white chocolate or almond bark
Sixlet candy pearls, white
-These can be found in the cake decorating section at Hannaford’s or Walmart)
Quart Ziploc freezer bag
Wax paper

**Raspberries and Cream Frosting**
2 cups (4 sticks) butter, at room temperature
5 cups powdered sugar
6 Tbsp. heavy cream
Raspberry flavoring
Vanilla extract
Neon food coloring (6 drops pink, 1 drop blue)

Cupcake Base:
1) Preheat oven to 350°F and prepare cupcake pan with liners (easy clean-up!) or cooking spray. This recipe makes about 24 cupcakes.
2) Heat the Guinness and butter in a medium-sized sauce pan until it comes to a soft boil.
3) Remove from heat, slowly whisk in cocoa powder, and then set aside to cool slightly.
4) Combine salt, eggs, and sour cream in a stand mixer, beat on medium until creamy.
5) Add Guinness mixture, beat on medium until combined.
6) Reduce speed and slowly add flour mixture, beat just until no streaks of flour remain.
7) Fill cupcake liners about half-way. (I used a pancake batter dispenser bottle to keep from spilling batter on my pan.)
8) Bake for about 17min at 350°F, or until a toothpick comes out clean.
9) After cupcakes have cooled, core the center to make room for yummy, creamy ganache! The holes should be about an inch across, and extend about halfway into the depth of the cupcake. (I used the wide end of my frosting tip, but a small spoon works well here, too.)

Ganache Filling:
1) Heat the heavy cream in the microwave until it is steaming hot, but not boiling. (I used a glass measuring cup for this step, so that I could pour directly into the cupcakes.)
2) Dump in the chocolate chips, wait 1 minute, then stir until completely melted.
3) Stir in butter (optional: add about 2 tsp. of Guinness or a flavorful Irish whiskey to give these cupcakes an extra kick!)
4) Allow to cool slightly, then carefully fill cupcakes. (I find that by the time I finish filling, the ganache in the first cupcakes has settled a bit, so I go ahead and add a smaller second helping to each cupcake for good measure! No such thing as too much chocolatey goodness.)

**White Chocolate Toppers:**
1) Put white chocolate or almond bark in the Ziploc bag. Seal bag, pushing the air out. (I personally find almond bark, which comes in both vanilla and chocolate, to be the most forgiving to work with, so I highly recommend it for beginners!)
2) Microwave the bag o’ chocolate just until melted. Depending on the microwave, you may need to stop every 20sec or so to rotate the bag to prevent it from getting unevenly hot.
3) Cut a teeny tiny hole in the corner of the bag. Squeeze gently and swirl over the wax paper to create whatever designs you like! As each topper is completed, add an extra drop of chocolate and place the Sixlet pearl there, pressing gently to secure it in place.
4) After the chocolate has cooled completely and set, carefully slide your hand under the wax paper and peel it away from each topper.
5) Voila! Your toppers are ready, awaiting their final destination atop a delicious cloud of frosting!

**Frosting:**
NOTE: Be sure to let your cupcakes cool completely (including the ganache!) before applying the frosting, otherwise it may slide right off! I suggest using the cooling time to make the white chocolate toppers.
1) Using the whisk attachment on a stand mixer, beat the butter on medium-high for several minutes until it becomes smooth and airy.
2) Add the heavy cream all at once, followed by 1 cup of powdered sugar at a time. With each addition, reduce speed to low at first, then work up to high speed to whip air into it. This will give you a light and creamy frosting.
3) Add food coloring (opt.) and flavoring, adjusting to a taste that you like. (You can also add a smidge of lemon extract if you like.)
4) Give everything one final, high speed whip, and it’s ready to meet your cupcakes!

Tips:
- I used a Wilton No. tip and a quart freezer bag to frost the cupcakes.
- It’s important to add the toppers immediately after frosting, so that they stick.
- These cupcakes will keep for at least several days in a sealed container in the fridge. I imagine they *could* last a week or longer, but desserts like this never make it that long in my house!
- Be creative! Use this recipe as a base to make your own crazy creations! Play with different frosting flavorings, cupcake fillings, etc. The possibilities are endless! 😊