

BASIC CAKE BALLS

1 (18.25-ounce) boxed cake mix plus ingredients called for on box

1 (16-ounce) can prepared frosting

Almond Bark Coating or Confectionery Wafer Coating (both recipes follow)



Strawberry cake balls with chocolate coating

Bake the cake according to package instructions. While warm, crumble the cake into a bowl with a hand mixer to a fine texture. Mix in frosting to make a paste, using 3/4 to a full can of frosting, according to taste. Chill the mixture for at least 2 hours.

Using a melon baller or your hands, form the mixture into 1½-inch balls. Place the balls on wax paper; freeze at least 6 hours.

Working in small batches, remove the balls from the freezer and dip the balls into warm, melted Almond Bark Coating or Confectionery Wafer Coating, using toothpicks or forks to manipulate the balls. Remove the balls. Place the balls on wax paper to harden.

Makes about 30 cake balls.

Almond Bark Coating: In a double boiler, melt one (20-ounce) package vanilla- or chocolate-flavored almond bark, stirring constantly. Or, in a tall, narrow container, microwave almond bark for 45 seconds on High (100 percent power). Continue to heat in 15-second intervals, stirring between intervals, until melted; be careful not to scorch.

When almond bark is melted, stir in 1 teaspoon vegetable oil. If desired, stir in oil-based coloring drop by drop until you achieve the desired color. See "Where to find supplies" for purchase information.

Confectionery Wafer Coating: Melt 48 ounces confectionery wafers in double boiler or microwave oven per instructions for Almond Bark Coating. Omit oil. If desired, stir in oil-based coloring drop by drop until you achieve the desired color.



FOR GIRLY GIRLS

Use the Basic Cake Ball recipe with a strawberry cake mix and strawberry frosting. Coat with melted Guittard milk-chocolate disks. Decorate with melted Guittard white-chocolate disks tinted red with AmeriColor oil candy color. (Use a squeeze bottle.)



FOR CHOCOHOLICS

Use the Basic Cake Ball recipe with a devil's food cake mix and cream-cheese frosting. Coat in melted Guittard white-chocolate disks tinted with AmeriColor oil candy color (using green and blue to make turquoise). Decorate with melted Guittard milk-chocolate disks. (Use a squeeze bottle.)

FOR KIDS



Use the Basic Cake Ball recipe with a white Pillsbury Funfetti cake mix, white frosting and rainbow-colored jimmies. Coat with melted Guittard white-chocolate disks tinted pink with AmeriColor oil candy color. Decorate exteriors with India Tree Sparkling Sugar in Ultraviolet (purple) and hot pink, as well as CK Products' Bright Sequins.

TIP: After mixing the cake and frosting, gently fold in 2 tablespoons rainbow-colored jimmies (sprinkles) to maintain the pops of color, because the sprinkles in the boxed mix fade when the baked, crumbled cake is mixed with frosting.

CAKE BALL TIPS

- 1. Chill the cake-and-frosting mixture well** (at least 2 hours) before you shape the balls. Freeze the balls at least 6 hours before dipping. Before dipping, make sure the cake balls aren't frozen solid because after being dipped, the coating has a tendency to crack when drying. Pre-dipped cake balls can be kept frozen for weeks.
- 2. To form the balls, use a melon scoop** for uniform size. Small balls are easier to eat.
- 3. Work in small batches when dipping**, keeping the rest in the freezer.
- 4. Use toothpicks, a fork or a skewer to manipulate the balls when dipping.** Perfectionists may want to buy a candy-dipping fork because it ensures even coating of each cake ball to make it look like a truffle.
- 5. Use oil-based candy dye to color frosting.** Start with a few drops, and add a little at a time.
- 6. Lay the dipped balls on wax paper to harden**, placing the spot where you pierced the ball down to cover the hole, or cover the hole with decoration.
- 7. For decoration**, fill a narrow-tip plastic squeeze bottle with a contrasting color of melted coating and paint stripes over the balls, or sprinkle on rainbow jimmies, colored sparkling sugar or finely chopped nuts. (If you are using oil-based candy color to tint coating made from white-chocolate disks, decorate with sprinkles quickly as the oil candy color causes the coating to set rapidly.)
- 8. Dipped balls will keep at room temperature for days**; if you refrigerate them, the coating will sweat.

CHOCOLATE-CARROT CAKE BALLS

- 2 cups flour
- 2 cups sugar
- 1/3 cup baking cocoa
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 4 eggs
- 1½ cups vegetable oil
- 4 medium carrots, coarsely shredded (see note)
- Cream-Cheese Frosting (recipe follows)
- Dark-Chocolate Confectionery Coating (recipe follows)

Preheat oven to 350 F; grease and flour 2 (9-inch) cake pans. Sift the flour, sugar, cocoa, salt, baking powder and baking soda into a medium bowl.

With an electric mixer, beat the eggs and oil together at low speed until well-combined. Add the flour mixture, beating until just combined. Stir in the carrots. Pour into prepared cake pans. Bake on the middle oven rack for 50 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle of cake comes out clean. Remove from oven, allow to cool slightly; while still warm, crumble the cake into a large bowl. With a fork, mash in Cream-Cheese Frosting. Chill mixture for at least 2 hours.

With your hands, form the mixture into 1½-inch balls; place balls on wax paper, and freeze at least 6 hours.

Using toothpicks or a fork, dip each ball into warm melted Dark- Chocolate Confectionery Coating, working in small batches. Set on wax paper to cool.

Makes 4 dozen.

Note: Coarsely chop the carrots for a bit of orange in the finished balls.

Cream-Cheese Frosting: Cream 8 ounces softened cream cheese and 4 tablespoons softened butter with an electric mixer at medium speed until fluffy and smooth. Add 1 tablespoon vanilla extract and 1 cup powdered sugar; beat at high speed until creamy.

Dark-Chocolate Confectionery Coating: Heat and stir 48 ounces (3 pounds) dark-chocolate flavor confectionery coating wafers, using a double boiler or microwave oven, just until melted, stirring until smooth, using care not to scorch.