
BLACK FOREST TIRAMISU (AKA CHERRYMISU)

The inspiration for this spoon dessert is Germany's famed Black Forest Cake, which was my all-time favorite cake when I was growing up. Using store-bought ladyfingers instead of baking chocolate cake layers makes this a very doable dessert even in the heat of summer. The chocolate flavor is introduced via dark cocoa in the Mascarpone cream and a hefty dose of grated bittersweet chocolate.

If you don't have Kirsch, a lovely cherry liqueur, you can use cherry vodka or even rum.

Serves 4

For the soaking liquid and cherries:

- 150 milliliters (1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons) water
- 50 grams (1.8 ounces) sugar
- 1 long strip orange zest
- 1 scraped vanilla pod
- 180 grams (6.3 ounces) PITTED halved cherries (weight after pitting; about 22 cherries)
- 60 milliliters (1/4 cup) Kirsch
- ½ teaspoon almond extract

For the Mascarpone-cocoa cream:

- 125 milliliters (1/2 cup) heavy cream
- 150 grams (5.3 ounces) Mascarpone (preferably imported Italian)
- 20 grams (1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon) sugar
- 15 grams (0.5 ounces) unsweetened cocoa

To layer:

- 10 crunchy ladyfingers
- 40 grams (1.5 ounces) grated bittersweet chocolate

- 1.** Make the soaking liquid and cherries: Combine the water, sugar, orange zest, the scraped vanilla pod, and the vanilla seeds in a small pot. Set over medium heat and bring to a gentle boil. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes, or until fragrant and ever so slightly thickened.
- 2.** Add the cherries and stir well. Cover and cook 10 minutes, or until the cherries soften but still hold their shape.
- 3.** Place a bowl on a counter. Spoon the cherries and their cooking liquid into a colander set over the bowl and allow to drain well.

4. Place the cherries in a bowl and cool to room temperature. This can be done in the freezer for 15 minutes if desired.
5. Add the Kirsch and almond extract to the cooking liquid and cool to room temperature. There should be about 3/4 cup of liquid. If needed, top up with some cool water or you won't have enough liquid for soaking the ladyfingers. The syrup can cool in the freezer for 15 minutes if desired.
6. Make the Mascarpone-cocoa cream: Beat the heavy cream to soft peaks.
7. In a large bowl, stir the Mascarpone with the sugar and cocoa until perfectly smooth.
8. Fold in one-quarter of the whipped cream, then switch to the whisk and incorporate the remaining whipped cream, being careful not to deflate it. The mixture is ready when there are no more white streaks left.
9. To layer: Dip the ladyfingers, one at a time, into the cooled soaking liquid. It is very important that the ladyfingers be thoroughly soaked in the mixture.
10. Line the bottom of a 6-inch square glass dish with 5 of the ladyfingers. Top with half of the Mascarpone cream. Cover with half of the grated chocolate.
11. Spoon the cooled cooked cherries over the chocolate.
12. Make a second layer with the remaining 5 soaked ladyfingers. Drizzle on any remaining soaking liquid.
13. Top with the remaining Mascarpone cream and top with the remaining grated chocolate. Cover well and refrigerate 24 hours. Serve chilled.