

SQUIDGY CHOCOLATE, ALMOND & PRUNE TORTE

- SERVES 8–10

55 g ready-to-eat pitted prunes, roughly chopped
50 ml brandy or Amaretto
3 medium eggs, separated
140 g caster sugar
200 g dark chocolate, 70% cocoa solids, roughly chopped
110 g unsalted butter or dairy-free baking margarine, diced
100 g ground almonds
40 g cornflour oil, for greasing

This rich and fruity torte was a particular favourite among the American and British art and architecture tourists I catered for in Tuscany many moons ago, and it stands the test of time with friends and family now. Serve with double cream or crème fraîche.

Soak the prunes in the brandy for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Grease a 20-cm springform tin with butter and line the base with greased greaseproof paper.

Beat the egg yolks with the caster sugar on high speed until thick and creamy.

Place the chocolate and 2 tablespoons of water in an ovenproof bowl, sitting on the rim of a small pan of simmering water. Stir the melting chocolate and water together until smooth. Slowly incorporate the butter, a few pieces at a time, to form a smooth, shiny liquid.

Pour the melted chocolate mixture over the whisked egg yolks, and gently fold together using a large metal spoon.

Sift the ground almonds and cornflour over the chocolate mixture, add the soaked prunes and brandy, and gently fold through.

In a clean, dry bowl, whisk the egg whites until they form firm peaks that do not wobble when the bowl is shaken. Stir a large spoonful into the chocolate mixture, then gently fold in the remaining egg whites.

Pour the mixture into the prepared tin, and bake in the centre of the oven for 35–40 minutes until the centre of the torte is just set. Leave to get cool in the tin on a wire rack.

Run a sharp knife around the edge of the torte, remove the tin and lining paper, and transfer the torte to a serving dish.

Serve in narrow slices with double cream or a dollop of crème fraîche on the side. Your guests can always come back for more.