

Chocolate Cakes

From *Dining with the Washingtons*, edited by Stephan McLeod.

The name of this recipe, which comes from Mary Randolph's *The Virginia House-Wife*, can be misleading, as it contains no chocolate. Instead, it is a very crisp, thin cookie, cut in strips that are to be dipped in Chocolate Cream. Randolph provided a guideline for presenting the cakes: "[P]ut them in the plate in rows to checker each other, and serve them to eat with chocolate."

Randolph's directions call for making the little cakes on a griddle. For ease of preparation, oven-baking directions are provided here.



Image courtesy of Renée Comet Photography

Makes 5 to 6 dozen cakes

1 3/4 cups loosely packed dark brown sugar
Scant 3 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
3/4 cup whole milk

1. Add the brown sugar to the flour, and mix together until well combined.
2. Heat the butter and milk together over medium-low heat, stirring until the milk is very warm and the butter begins to melt. Remove from the heat, and set aside to cool to lukewarm.

3. By hand, work the butter and milk into the flour and sugar, kneading until well combined. Continue to knead until the ingredients are thoroughly incorporated and the dough is smooth. Shape into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.
4. Position a rack in the upper third of the oven. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Grease large baking sheets with vegetable shortening.
5. Divide the dough into thirds, and roll out on a lightly floured surface to about 1/4 inch thick. Cut into 1-by-3-inch strips, and place 1 to 1 1/2 inches apart on the prepared baking sheets.
6. Bake the cakes for 8 to 9 minutes, or until they are lightly browned on the bottoms. With a spatula, immediately transfer them to wire racks and cool completely.
7. Store the cakes for up to 3 days in airtight containers.