

Chocolate Ricotta Brick Cake

Torta a Forma di Mattone al Cioccolato e Ricotta

Serves 8

When I was a child, ricotta had many uses in the kitchen, from appetizers to pasta to stuffings to baked desserts, but I remember especially loving it for breakfast, as a snack, or for lunch, spread on a slice of country bread and drizzled with honey or just sprinkled with cane sugar. A slice of this cake makes for the perfect breakfast, to my mind, and of course makes a dessert that is just as great and easy. Ricotta is delicious cooked or uncooked, as in this dessert, where the sweet creamy cheese mixes with an assemblage of other flavors.

10 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped
1 1/4 pounds fresh ricotta
1/4 cup superfine sugar
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract 1/2 cup heavy cream, chilled
3/4 cup raspberry jam
24 savoiardi

Line a 9-by-5-by-3-inch loaf pan with plastic wrap to overhang the sides. Melt the chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over simmering water (a double boiler). Let the chocolate cool until it's not hot to the touch but is still warm.

Combine the ricotta, sugar, and vanilla in a large bowl, and whisk well until the mixture is smooth. In another large bowl, whip the cream to soft peaks. Fold the cooled chocolate into the ricotta mixture, and then fold in the cream in two additions, keeping it light.

Put the jam in a bowl, and stir to loosen it up and make it spreadable (if it's very thick, you can add a tablespoon or two of warm water). Spread a third of the ricotta mixture in the loaf pan, and top with a single layer of savoiardi. Drizzle with half of the jam. Spread with another third of the ricotta mixture, another layer of savoiardi, and the remaining jam. Top with the remaining ricotta mixture, and top with the remaining savoiardi. Rap the pan on the counter a few times to settle it and get rid of air pockets. Cover the top loosely with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until set, at least 4 hours, though overnight is best.

Unmold it, using the plastic wrap as handles, and cut into thick slices crosswise to serve.