



CARAMEL APPLE SPICE CUPCAKES

**MAKES 12 CUPCAKES /
TIME: ABOUT AN HR**

2 tart, firm cooking apples, such as Granny Smith or Northern Spy

2 tablespoons organic dark brown sugar

1 tablespoon virgin coconut oil

1 cup unsweetened almond or coconut-based milk

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

½ cup canola oil

¾ cup organic granulated sugar

1 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1½ cups all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon baking powder

1½ teaspoons baking soda

¼ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

Caramel-penuche frosting:

½ cup organic dark brown sugar

3 tablespoons virgin coconut oil

½ cup almond or coconut-based creamer

2 tablespoons coconut flour

Pinch of salt

2½ cups confectioners' sugar

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

½ cup chopped, roasted almonds or peanuts, for sprinkling

This is the ideal autumnal cupcake: it's bursting with caramelized apple chunks, just the right amount of spice, and topped with old-fashioned, fun-to-say penuche frosting with a light caramel flavor.

Preheat the oven to 350°F and line a 12-cup muffin tin with paper cupcake liners.

Leaving the skins on the apples, core and dice them into small pieces (about ¼-inch cubes), for about 1⅓ cups of diced apple.

Heat the brown sugar and coconut oil in a heavy skillet over medium heat, stirring, until the mixture begins to bubble. Add the apple pieces and stir to coat. Cook the apples, stirring occasionally, until almost all of the water has evaporated and the apples are lightly caramelized, about 12 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to cool before proceeding.

In a large bowl, whisk together the milk and lemon juice, and allow to sit for a minute to curdle. Add the canola oil, granulated sugar, lemon zest, and vanilla, and beat well. Sift in the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg, then stir only until the dry ingredients are moistened. Fold in the sautéed apples along with any remaining juices.

Fill the cupcake liners three-quarters of the way with batter, and bake for 20 to 22 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of a cupcake comes out clean.

When the cupcakes are done, remove them from the oven and cool on wire cooling racks.

While they cool, prepare the frosting: Combine the brown sugar, coconut oil, creamer, coconut flour, and salt in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. Stir and bring to a boil. Allow the mixture to boil and foam for 7 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from the heat.

When the frosting mixture has cooled slightly and is still a little warm, stir in ¼ cup of the confectioners' sugar and the vanilla, then beat with an electric mixer for 2 to 3 minutes, until creamy. Slowly beat in the remaining ¾ cup of confectioners' sugar until a thick, smooth, fudgelike frosting forms. (The frosting can be spread warm or slightly cooled, but too much cooling will make the frosting too stiff to spread. If this happens, just let it warm to room temperature.)

Frost the cupcakes and sprinkle with the chopped almonds or peanuts.

TIP

If you demand cupcakes with a completely flat top, you will have a little extra batter. Make sure to have a few extra cupcake liners handy to bake a few extra cupcakes after you've finished the first batch.