

Butternut squash muffins with a frosty top

My kids love these squash muffins. They taste a bit like carrot cake, as the two vegetables are very similar – I’ve simply swapped carrots for squash. Both of them are wonderful carriers of flavours like cinnamon, cloves and vanilla. The skin of a butternut squash goes deliciously chewy and soft when cooked, so there’s no need to peel it off. Give these little cakes a go – they’re a perfect naughty-but-nice treat. And a great way of getting your kids to eat squash!

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas 4. Line your muffin tins with paper cases.

Whiz the squash in a food processor until finely chopped. Add the sugar, and crack in the eggs. Add a pinch of salt, the flour, baking powder, walnuts, cinnamon and olive oil and whiz together until well beaten. You may need to pause the machine at some point to scrape the mix down the sides with a rubber spatula. Try not to overdo it with the mixing – you want to just combine everything and no more.

Fill the paper cases with the cake mixture. Bake in the preheated oven for 20 to 25 minutes. Check to see whether they are cooked properly by sticking a wooden skewer or a knife right into one of the cakes – if it comes out clean, they’re done. If it’s a bit sticky, pop them back into the oven for a little longer. Remove from the oven and leave the cakes to cool on a wire rack.

As soon as the muffins are in the oven, make your runny frosted topping. Place most of the clementine zest, all the lemon zest and the lemon juice in a bowl. Add the soured cream, icing sugar and vanilla seeds and mix well. Taste and have a think about it – adjust the amount of lemon juice or icing sugar to balance the sweet and sour. Put into the fridge until your cakes have cooled down, then spoon the topping on to the cakes.

Serve on a lovely plate (on a cake stand if you’re feeling elegant, or on a rustic slab if you’re more of a hunter-gatherer type!), with the rest of the clementine zest sprinkled over. For an interesting flavour and look, a few dried lavender flowers or rose petals are fantastic.

makes 12 muffins

400g butternut squash, skin on, deseeded and roughly chopped
350g light soft brown sugar
4 large free-range or organic eggs
sea salt
300g plain flour, unsifted
2 heaped teaspoons baking powder
a handful of walnuts
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
175ml extra virgin olive oil

for the frosted cream topping
zest of 1 clementine
zest of 1 lemon and juice of ½ a lemon
140ml soured cream
2 heaped tablespoons icing sugar, sifted
optional: lavender flowers or rose petals
1 vanilla pod, split lengthways and seeds scraped out

