# Black Velvet Halloween Cake

Makes: 8 slices for a 6" cake, 12 slices for an 8" cake
Prep Time: 30 minutes Cook Time: 35 minutes
Total Time: 1 hour & 5 minutes plus cooling time 2 hours

## Ingredients

### For the Cake:

- 2 cups (265g) all-purpose flour
- 1 & 1/2 cups (300g) granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup (60g) black cocoa powder
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 cup (120ml) vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup (130g) unsweetened applesauce
- 2 tsp pure vanilla extract
- 2 tsp white vinegar or apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup (240ml) soy milk, at room temperature
- 3/4 cup (180ml) hot coffee or hot water

### For the Black Buttercream:

- 2 cups (453g) unsalted vegan butter sticks, softened but still cool
- 5 cups (600g) powdered sugar
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup (112g) black cocoa powder
- 1 tbsp non-dairy milk, plus more as needed
- Black gel food coloring, optional

### For the White Ghost Decorations:

- 1/4 cup reserved buttercream, before adding the black cocoa powder
- Clear vanilla extract, if needed
- White gel food coloring, optional
- A tiny amount of violet gel food coloring, optional, to counteract yellow tones

### For Decorating:

- Black buttercream for the eyes, mouths, and shell borders

## Instructions

### For the Cake:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Prepare three 6-inch cake pans or two 8-inch cake pans by spraying the sides with baking spray and lining the bottoms with parchment circles.

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, black cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Add the vegetable oil, applesauce, vanilla, vinegar, and soy milk. Whisk until combined, then carefully whisk in the hot coffee or hot water. The batter will be quite thin.

Divide the batter evenly among the prepared pans. Bake for 30–35 minutes, until a wooden toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Let the cakes cool completely before frosting.

### For the Frosting:

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the vegan butter on medium speed for 2–3 minutes, until smooth and creamy. The butter should be softened but still cool, not warm or greasy. Scrape down the bowl and paddle.

Add the powdered sugar in two or three additions, mixing on low speed after each addition. Add the vanilla and 1 tbsp of non-dairy milk. Beat until smooth, scraping down the bowl as needed.

Before adding the black cocoa, reserve 1/4 cup of the buttercream for the ghosts. If desired, add clear vanilla and a tiny amount of white gel coloring to brighten it. If the frosting looks yellow, a very small amount of violet gel coloring may help neutralize the tone. Add coloring sparingly to avoid a lavender tint.

Sift the black cocoa powder into the remaining buttercream. Mix on low speed until

incorporated, then increase to medium speed and beat until smooth. If the frosting is too stiff to spread, add more non-dairy milk 1 tsp at a time. If you want a deeper black, add black gel food coloring gradually. Keep in mind that the color will deepen as the frosting rests.

The finished black buttercream should be thick enough to hold its shape on a spatula. If it looks loose, glossy, or greasy, don't add more liquid. Check its temperature instead. If it feels warm, refrigerate it briefly, then mix again until smooth.

Once the cake layers are completely cool, level them if needed. Fill and stack the layers with black buttercream, then apply a thin crumb coat over the entire cake. Refrigerate for 20–30 minutes, until the frosting is firm.

Apply the remaining black buttercream and smooth the sides and top. Refrigerate until the frosting is firm to the touch.

Use a small icing spatula to spread the reserved white buttercream into ghost shapes around the cake. If the white frosting has softened too much to hold its shape, chill it briefly until it is spreadable but firm.

Transfer about 2 tbsp of black buttercream to a piping bag fitted with a small round tip. Pipe two eyes and a mouth onto each ghost. Fit another piping bag with a large open-star tip and use the remaining black buttercream to pipe shell borders around the top and bottom edges. Refrigerate the cake until the frosting is set. Before serving, let it stand at room temperature for about 20–30 minutes in a cool room, keeping an eye on the frosting as it softens.

## Chef's Notes:

- Vegan butter: Use firm vegan butter sticks rather than tub-style spreads. Different brands have different moisture contents and melting points, so the frosting may behave differently depending on which one you choose. Earth Balance Vegan Buttery Sticks are an alternative readers can try, but they are not guaranteed to solve every frosting issue.
- Adding liquid: Start with just 1 tbsp of non-dairy milk and add more only as needed. You may not need the full amount called for in the original recipe.
- Troubleshooting curdled frosting: If the frosting looks grainy or separated, check its temperature before continuing to beat. If it is too warm, chill it briefly. If it is too cold, let it soften slightly. Then mix again until smooth.
- Getting a deeper black: Use a very dark black cocoa powder and allow the frosting to rest before judging its final color. Black gel food coloring can help deepen the shade.

- Whiter ghosts: Clear vanilla helps avoid adding color. White gel coloring can improve opacity, while a tiny amount of violet gel coloring can counteract yellow tones.
- Room-temperature serving: Vegan buttercreams vary in stability, and this frosting has not been tested with the adjustments above. Keep the cake refrigerated until shortly before serving, and don't leave it out if the frosting begins to soften or slide.
- Make ahead: The cake layers can be wrapped tightly and stored at room temperature for up to two days or frozen for up to two months. The buttercream can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to two weeks. Bring it back to a workable temperature and rebeat until smooth before using.
- Dietary note: The cake and frosting are made without dairy or eggs when prepared with the specified ingredients. Check ingredient labels if you are baking for someone with an allergy.