

Lemon and Strawberry Cupcakes



MAKES 12 CUPCAKES

COOK TIME 20 MINUTES, PLUS COOLING

FOR THE SPONGES

100g (4oz) baking spread
150g (5oz) self-raising flour
150g (5oz) caster sugar
3 tbsp milk
2 eggs
finely grated zest of 1 lemon
7g (¼ oz) freeze-dried strawberries (see tip)
½ jar homemade or shop-bought luxury lemon curd

FOR THE MERINGUE

2 egg whites
100g (4oz) caster sugar

METHOD

1. You will need a 12-hole muffin tin lined with paper cases and a piping bag fitted with a plain 1cm (½ in) nozzle (optional). Preheat the oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4.
2. First make the sponges. Measure the baking spread, flour, sugar, milk and eggs into a large bowl and add the lemon zest. Use an electric hand whisk to beat until light and fluffy, then fold in three-quarters of the strawberries. Spoon the mixture into the paper cases (see tip), dividing it evenly among them. Bake in the oven for 18-20 minutes or until golden, risen and springy to the touch. Set aside to cool on a wire rack.
3. When the cupcakes are cold, use a small sharp knife to cut a circle (about the diameter of a £2 coin) in the centre of each cake and scoop out a walnut-sized piece of sponge to leave a hole. Spoon 1 teaspoon of lemon curd into each hole, making sure the curd is level with the top of the cake.
4. To make the meringue, whisk the egg whites until stiff in a large, spotlessly clean bowl using an electric hand whisk. Gradually add the sugar a little at a time and continue whisking on full speed until you have a stiff glossy mixture.
5. Use a small palette knife to spread some of the meringue mixture on the top of each cupcake, or pipe the mixture on if using a piping bag, and place back in the moulds of the muffin tin. Use a blowtorch or heat briefly under a hot grill to lightly brown the tops of the cupcakes – watching carefully as it only takes a minute – and sprinkle over the remaining strawberries to serve. Allow to cool and enjoy!

FREEZE

- The cupcake sponges freeze well un-iced.

MARY'S EVERYDAY TIPS

- You can buy little morsels of freeze-dried strawberry in a see-through plastic tube at any good supermarket. All the moisture and liquid has been removed on freeze-drying, so the flavour is intense.
- Don't over-fill the cases, as you need a little extra space to add the meringue topping once the cakes have cooled.