



Pumpkin and spice and everything nice

Tis the season of everything pumpkin. It's an obsession, really. A national frenzy. I read somewhere that we still have four seasons, but they are now winter, spring, summer and pumpkin spice.

I do believe Starbucks is to blame. (Who else?!) They introduced their ever-popular pumpkin spice latte in 2002, and it's been a slippery slope ever since.

According to a CNBC article, Starbucks started offering the drink on Sept. 3 this year, but dedicated fans could get a "secret code" to "unlock" their local store and get the drink on Aug. 28. August!!



Since the pumpkin spice latte is only offered for a limited time, fans anticipate the season with glee, drinking up as much of it as they can in the short fall months. Social media posts sure aren't helping the craze either.

McDonald's and Dunkin' Donuts are joining the obsession this year, with their versions of the pumpkin spice latte. (I don't even like coffee, so we won't get into the debate over which one is better.)

Pumpkin has found its way into not only coffee but also pastries, soups, beers, desserts and more. The CNBC article said restaurants' pumpkin-inspired limited-time offers are up 234 percent from 2008 to 2012, and 2013 is looking promising.

So why has pumpkin grown from the once-a-year treat at Thanksgiving dinner to the obsession it is today?

An NPR article suggests it's more about the "pumpkin feeling" than the flavor or nutrition. It's about nostalgia and the idea that pumpkins represent this perfect little farm life. And that gives people a good feeling.

What used to be a food for desperate times became something to be celebrated when people in the 19th century began moving into the cities and away from the rural way of life.

We want to be romantic about old-fashioned ideas, whether it's drinking pumpkin spice lattes, wearing suspenders or pickin' on an old banjo. OK, not everyone takes it that far, but we take our families to pumpkin patches and can't wait to ride the hayrack ride, pick our own pumpkins and take in the nostalgic crunch of a good, big pile of leaves.

In Holyoke, the weather's turned chilly and it just smells like fall! So I cooked up some sweet, moist mini pumpkin cakes in honor of the "pumpkin spice season."

I mixed and matched so I could include a cream cheese glaze with my cakes. The full cake recipe can be found at tasteofhome.com, and the frosting is from rosebakes.com. I used mini bundt cake pans, so depending on the size of yours or if you use a cupcake pan, you might have to adjust the baking time.

Happy Pumpkin Spice Season!!



Mini Pumpkin Cakes

1 package spice cake mix (regular size)
1 package (3.4 ounces) instant vanilla pudding mix
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
4 eggs
1 cup canned pumpkin
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup canola oil
3/4 cup chopped walnuts

In a large bowl, combine the first seven ingredients. Beat on low speed for 30 seconds; beat on medium for 2 minutes. Fold in walnuts. Spoon into greased miniature fluted tube pans. Bake at 350 degrees for 20-25 minutes. Cool for 10 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks to cool completely.

For cream cheese glaze:

4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature

1 tablespoon butter, at room temperature

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

4-6 tablespoons whole milk

1/3-1/2 cup powdered sugar (Depends on how sweet you want it!!)

Cream together the cream cheese, butter, vanilla and 4 tablespoons of milk. Beat until it's very smooth and creamy! Gradually add in the powdered sugar until you have a consistency that you like. Taste for sweetness, add more powdered sugar and/or milk as needed.

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