

## CHOCOLATE-CHESTNUT CAKE

This is a seriously compelling piece of cake-bakery: definitely pudding – and an elegant one at that – rather than afternoon tea, though I think I might be able to force a slice down with a cup of coffee at unscheduled moments in the day. Really, you need serve nothing with it: apart from anything else, it's not so sweet as to need the masking properties of cream.

435g tin unsweetened chestnut puree	pinch of salt
125g soft unsalted butter	50g caster sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract	25g light muscovado sugar
1 tablespoon dark rum	22cm Springform tin, greased and lined
6 large eggs, separated	
250g melted chocolate	

cPreheat the oven to 180°C/gas mark 4.

Beat the chestnut purée with the butter, then add the vanilla, rum, egg yolks and melted chocolate, blending well. I use my KitchenAid here, but an ordinary electric hand-held mixer would be fine – or even a bowl and wooden spoon. In another large bowl, whip the egg whites with the salt until they are foamy. Add the caster sugar gradually to form stiffer, glossy peaks, and then sprinkle the muscovado sugar over and either fold in or whisk in slowly. Fold the whites, gently but confidently, into the chestnut mixture, a third at a time.

Pour into the tin and cook for 45 minutes, until the cake has risen and is firm on top; it will look dry and cracked, but don't panic: it won't taste dry, and the cracks don't matter a damn.

Cool in the tin for 20 minutes, and then turn out on a rack.

When you want to eat it, dust with icing sugar and serve with modest pride.

Serves 8–10.