



Mr. Ha Ha's New York-Style Birthday Mini-Cheesecake Cupcakes

If Dorothy had known these were on the menu at Mr. Ha Ha's Hacienda Hut, she might have been able to weather her birthday luncheon with Rose and Blanche a little better.

MAKES: ABOUT 24 SMALL (2-INCH) CUPCAKES • PREP TIME: 40 MINUTES • COOK TIME: 40 MINUTES (PLUS CHILL TIME)

FOR THE CRUST:

9 ounces graham crackers (about
16 whole crackers)

½ cup sugar

½ teaspoon salt

9 tablespoons unsalted
butter, melted and cooled

MAKE AND FORM THE CRUST:

1 Crumble the graham crackers into the food processor. Pulse until coarsely chopped. (Work with half the graham crackers at a time if your processor isn't large enough to hold them in one batch.) Add the sugar and salt and process until the crackers are finely ground. Pour in the melted butter and process, scraping down the sides of the processor a few times, until the butter is completely mixed in and the crumb mixture looks like very wet, fine sand. Scrape the crumb mix into a bowl and, if necessary, cool to room temperature.

2 Press 2 tablespoons of the crumb mixture into each of the 24 small silicone baking cups (see notes), pressing it firmly against the bottom and sides. Don't worry if the sides aren't perfectly even. Set the filled cups on a baking sheet as you work. If you don't have enough cups to use up all the crust mix, bake the cupcakes in two batches. Chill the lined cups until needed.

Notes: Silicone baking cups come in different sizes. For a yield of 24 two-to-three bite cupcakes (as here), use cups that are about 2½ inches across the top and 1¼ inches high. Larger cups will, of course, make bigger but fewer cupcakes.

The crust mix and the filling mix each make about 3 cups. Depending on the size and shape of your baking cups, you may have a little of one or the other left over. Leftover crumbs make a good ice-cream topping. Bake leftover filling in the same cups without crusts.





FOR THE FILLING:

1 pound cream cheese, at room temperature and soft

½ cup sugar

1½ teaspoons cornstarch

1 egg + 1 yolk

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

¼ cup full-fat or reduced-fat sour cream

¾ teaspoon finely grated orange zest

¾ teaspoon finely grated lemon zest

MAKE THE FILLING:

3 Heat the oven to 350°F.

4 Using a handheld or stand mixer, beat the cream cheese, sugar, and cornstarch together until creamy, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl a few times. Beat in the egg and yolk, stopping once to scrape the sides and bottom of the bowl. Beat in the vanilla. Switch to the spatula and stir in the sour cream and both zests.

5 Divide the filling evenly among the cups on the baking sheet. (The filling shouldn't come above the edge of the crust.) Put the pan in the oven. Immediately turn down the heat to 300°F. Bake until the centers are firm, about 35 minutes. Remove and cool to room temperature. With your fingertip, gently brush any crust that extends over the cheesecake filling onto the baking sheet. Gather up the crumbs and sprinkle them over the tops of the cupcakes. Refrigerate the cupcakes, right on the baking sheet, until firm to the touch, about an hour.

6 Peel back the cups from the cupcakes and line them up on a clean baking sheet. Repeat with the remaining crust mix and filling if necessary. Serve chilled or remove to room temperature for 30 minutes before serving. Serve the cupcakes on a platter, cake stands, or a number of small plates. Any extra cheesecake cupcakes can be packed in an airtight container and refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for up to 1 month.

GOLDEN WISDOM

Avoid adding the zests to the batter while using the mixer; most of zest will end up stuck to the beaters or clumped together in the bowl.

And now it's time for the Mr. Ha Ha Birthday Roundup! When I call your name, please come up onstage!



Mr. Ha Ha



(to Rose)

Please say you didn't do this!

Patty Spina!



Jeannie Taylor!



(to Rose)

Please tell me you didn't do this!

Dorothy Zbornak!



(to Dorothy as she's throttling Rose)

Dorothy, you're making a fool of yourself! Mr. Ha Ha's looking at you!

Are you Dorothy Zbornak?



That's right.

Get up onstage, Dorothy!



Get bent, Ha Ha!

