

## Chocolate and almond cake

*Serves 8-10*

300g whole or ground almonds  
200g dark chocolate  
grated zest of 1 unwaxed orange  
(optional)  
200g caster sugar  
a pinch of salt  
4 tablespoons whole milk  
5 large eggs

There has to be a chocolate and almond cake. I have accumulated several over the years, all flourless. For years I made an Elizabeth David one, then a real *torta Caprese* from a real Capri-dweller, and now I have settled on something in between, which is inspired by an Anna del Conte recipe. This is a good cake, and straightforward, which is how cakes need to be for me: something you can make without too much fuss. Whether you use whole or ground almonds depends on whether you are using a food processor or not. I do it all by hand, so I buy good fresh ground almonds (always check the date), and chop the chocolate into relatively small but rough pieces that melt as it bakes, and which make the final cake a speckled beauty. It is a dense, moist cake with fat crumbs, not overly sweet but intensely chocolatey. Much has been written about the merits of baking with almonds and no butter, so I won't bore you. I sometimes add grated orange zest, which makes it reminiscent of a Chocolate Orange, which I like, but it competes with the almonds a little. I will leave the orange decision up to you.

You can take this cake anywhere and it will fit in. Dust it with icing sugar if the occasion is celebratory, or dark cocoa if it is fancy. Vincenzo tells me it is an ideal breakfast cake, but he is Sicilian and can eat cassata first thing in the morning. I like it at about 11 o'clock with a cup of tea, at 4 o'clock with an espresso, or for pudding with cold cream.

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Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas mark 4. Generously butter and flour a 26cm cake tin, with a loose bottom if you like. If you want to roast the whole nuts (which is nice for the flavour, but not essential), spread them on a baking sheet and toast in the oven for 4-5 minutes, then rub them with a clean tea towel to get rid of the papery skins.

If you are using a food processor and whole almonds, pulse the nuts a few times, then add the roughly chopped chocolate



and orange zest, if using, and pulse until you have a coarse mixture. Turn it out into a large bowl.

If you are doing everything by hand, chop the chocolate finely with a sharp knife, grate over the orange zest, if using, then mix it with the ground almonds in a large bowl.

Add the sugar, salt and milk to the almonds and chocolate and mix well. Separate the eggs, setting the whites aside, then beat the egg yolks into the mixture one by one. Whisk the egg whites in another bowl until they form stiff peaks, then fold them into the mixture. Scrape the mixture into the prepared tin and bake for 40–50 minutes, or until the cake is firm and just taking on some colour at the edges. Allow to cool in the tin for a while before turning out.