**Dulce de Leche Cheesecake with Brownie Crust**

**Ingredients**

**For the crust:**

* 3 ounces bittersweet chocolate
* ¼ cup unsalted butter
* ½ cup granulated sugar
* 1 large egg
* 1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste
* ½ cup all-purpose flour
* ¼ teaspoon salt
* ¼ cup chopped, toasted nuts (optional)

**For the filling:**

* 24 ounces cream cheese, softened
* ½ cup packed light brown sugar
* 3 large eggs, lightly beaten
* 1 ½ teaspoons vanilla bean paste
* 1 cup prepared dulce de leche (easy recipe follows)

**For the whipped cream:**

* ¾ cup heavy cream
* 4 oz cream cheese, softened
* ½ cup powdered sugar
* 3 tablespoons dulce de leche
* chocolate shavings, for garnish

**Instructions**

**To make the crust:**

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease a 9-inch springform pan.

Place chocolate and butter in a microwave-safe bowl. Heat at half power in microwave in 30-second increments until butter has melted and chocolate melts when stirred. Stir until smooth. Set aside to cool slightly.

Combine sugar, egg, and vanilla. Add chocolate mixture, mixing until combined. Add flour and salt, mixing just until combined.

Transfer batter to prepared pan and spread evenly. Bake 15 to 20 minutes, or until a pick inserted into the center comes out with moist crumbs. Set pan on a wire rack and allow to cool completely.

**To make the filling:**

Preheat oven to 350°.

Using an electric mixer on medium speed, beat cream cheese, dulce de leche and brown sugar until fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Mix in vanilla.

Pour batter onto cooled crust in pan. Spread evenly.

Bake for 15 minutes. Do not open the oven door.

Reduce oven temperature to 200°. Continue baking for 2 hours.

Turn off oven. Remove cheesecake from oven and gently run a knife around the edges of the pan, if using standard springform pan. Return cheesecake to oven. Leave cheesecake in oven for 2 hours.

Then, cover loosely and refrigerate overnight.

Remove the cheesecake from the springform pan and prepare for serving.

**To make the whipped cream:**

Beat cream cheese, powdered sugar and reserved dulce de leche in a small bowl and set aside. Place cream in a large, cold mixing bowl. Using an electric mixer with a whisk attachment, beat at medium-high speed until the cream begins to form pretty stiff peaks. Add cream cheese and dulce de leche mixture to the cream and continue beating until desired consistency is achieved.

Pipe topping or spread on cheesecake and garnish, then serve

**Easy Dulce de Leche**

* 4 ea cans sweetened condensed milk, labels removed
* Slow cooker
* Boiling Water

Place sweetened condensed milk in slow cooker, pour boiling water over the cans to just cover. Put lid on slow cooker, turn to high & leave for 10 hours for dark dulce de leche. 8 – 9 hours for light & medium. Remove & place on a rack to cool prior to opening/using. You only need 1 – 1 ½ cans for this recipe, so you’ll have some left over for something else, or to give as gifts.

*Note: for mini cheesecakes, you will need to double the crust recipe for 48 ea mini cheesecakes*