

LAVENDER MACARONS WITH WHITE CHOCOLATE GANACHE

(slightly adapted from Craftsby.com)

Yield: About 72 shells; 36 assembled macarons

for the shells:

198 g powdered sugar
113 g almond meal
1/8 teaspoon dried lavender
113 g egg whites (I aged mine for three days)
1 g or a pinch of cream of tartar
100 g granulated sugar
Purple Gel color from AmeriColor
2 drops vanilla extract

for the filling:

170 g white chocolate
85 g heavy cream
2 drops lavender extract

Line 2 or 3 heavy baking sheets with parchment paper or Silpat mats. Layer the powdered sugar, almond meal and lavender in a food processor or mini processor. Pulse until the mixture looks like fine meal, about 15 seconds. Pass through a sieve and transfer to a small bowl. Set aside.

Place the egg whites and pinch of cream of tartar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Make sure that the bowl and the whisk are impeccably clean. Starting on medium speed, whip the whites with the cream of tartar until they look like light foam. The whites should not appear liquid. The foam will be light and should not have any structure.

Slowly rain in the granulated sugar, trying to aim the stream between the whisk and the side of the bowl. Turn the speed up to medium-high. Continue to whip the meringue until it is soft and shiny. It should look like marshmallow creme. Add the gel color and the vanilla. Staying at medium-high speed, whip the egg whites until the mixture begins to dull and the lines of the whisk are visible on the surface of the meringue. Check the peak. It should be firm. When you hold the beater up, the meringue should gently fall with an angle supporting the peak at the with the angle supporting the peak at 11:30hs (easier to understand on the tutorial video). Transfer the whites to a medium bowl.

Fold in the almond meal mixture in three increments. Paint the mixture halfway up the side of the bowl, using the flat side of a spatula. Scrape the mixture down to the center of the bowl. Repeat two or three times, then check to see if the mixture slides slowly down the side of the bowl. Put the mixture in a piping bag fitted with one of the tips listed above. Pipe on the prepared baking sheets.

Slam each sheet hard four to six times on the counter. Then fist bump each end of the sheet's underside twice. Let the unbaked macarons dry until they look dull but not overly dry. Drying time depends on humidity. In a dry climate, the macarons can dry in 15 to 20 minutes; in a humid climate, it can take 35 to 40 minutes.

While the macarons are drying, heat the oven to 330 F (170 C/gas mark 3). Bake one sheet at a time on the middle rack. Check in 11 minutes. If the tops slide, then bake for 2 to 3 more minutes. The macarons should release without sticking. Check one or two. If they stick, put them back in the oven for 1 to 2 more minutes. Let the macarons cool for 10 minutes before removing from the pan.

Make the filling: Place the white chocolate in a heatproof bowl. Bring the cream to a rolling boil in a small saucepan. Pour the hot cream over the chocolate, and let stand for 15 seconds. Stir with a spatula until smooth. If the chocolate has not fully melted, place the bowl in a saucepan of steaming water (the heat should be off), and let stand for 1 or 2 minutes. Stir again until the chocolate is fully melted. Add the lavender extract.

Assemble the macarons: find two macarons similar in size and add a good amount of ganache to the bottom of one of them. Place the other on top and squeeze gently to take the filling all the way to the edge. Ideally, store in the fridge for 24 hours before devouring them... or sharing with great friends!