

RASPBERRY GANACHE MACARONS

(from the Bewitching Kitchen)

for the shells:

198 g powdered sugar
113 g almond meal
113 g egg whites at room temperature
a pinch of cream of tartar
100 g granulated sugar
pink gel color from AmeriColor
2 drops vanilla extract

for the filling:

8 ounces white chocolate
1/2 cup raspberry jam
2 1/2 tablespoons heavy cream

to decorate:

drizzle of white chocolate
freeze dried-raspberries
sparkly sprinkles

Line 2 or 3 heavy baking sheets with parchment paper or Silpat mats. Layer the powdered sugar and almond meal in a food 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. 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. If using edible gold powder, sprinkle a little with a brush and use a hand-held fan to spread it over like dust.

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 macaroons cool for 10 minutes before removing from the pan.

Make the filling: Place chocolate in a heatproof bowl and set over a pot of simmering water on low heat. Stir chocolate until melted. Remove from heat, and whisk in jam and heavy cream. Cover and chill 2 hours, or until cold. Whip it with a hand-held electric mixer until it reaches a good consistency for piping. Transfer ganache to a piping bag fitted with a 1/4-inch star tip.

Assemble the macarons: find two macarons similar in size and pipe a good amount of filling 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. Decorate any way you want, or leave them plain. Store in the fridge for 24 hours for perfect texture.