

CHRISTMAS MACARONS

(from the Bewitching Kitchen, adapted from Colette Christian)

for the shells:

200 g powdered sugar
115 g almond meal
115 g egg whites at room temperature
a pinch of cream of tartar
100 g granulated sugar
Red or Green gel color from Artisan Accents
1/4 tsp vanilla paste

for the filling:

Raspberry jam
or
240g white chocolate, chopped
5 Tablespoons heavy cream
1/4 to 1/2 tsp peppermint extract
1/8 cup mini mint chocolate chips (optional)

to decorate:

white candy melts
red food color
gold dust dissolved in lemon extract or vodka
sprinkles of your choice
or
Royal Icing:
40 g egg whites
210 g powdered sugar
lemon juice

Line 2 or 3 heavy baking sheets with 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. Let the unbaked macarons dry until they look dull, 30 to 40 minutes.

While the macarons are drying, heat the oven to 300 F. 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. Let the macarons cool for 10 minutes before removing from the pan.

Make the filling: Melt the white chocolate with the mint chips (if using) in a double boiler or microwave, very gently. Add the heavy cream and stir until smooth. Add the peppermint extract. Allow it to cool to almost room temperature and whisk with a hand-held mixer to achieve piping consistency. Do not over- whip or the ganache will go grainy. Use to fill shells.

Decorate with melted Candy melts and sprinkles. For the brush effect, use a fan brush on a mixture of gold dust with lemon extract. To make the Royal Icing mix all ingredients in a Kitchen Aid type mixer for 5 minutes, adjust consistency with lemon juice or powdered sugar.

Store macarons in the fridge for 24 hours before serving.