

SMOKED CHOCOLATE MACARONS

(from the Bewitching Kitchen)

For the shells:

200g Icing/powdered sugar
115 g ground almonds
115 g egg whites at room temperature (approx. 4 eggs)
1/8 tsp of cream of tartar
100 g granulated sugar
¼ tsp vanilla paste or extract
black gel food color

for the smoked chocolate ganache:

150g heavy cream (you won't use the full amount in the ganache)
1 bag smoked black tea (Lapsang Souchon)
2 tsp corn syrup
230g semi-sweet chocolate in pieces

Start by making the filling, as it must cool down before using. Bring the heavy cream to a gentle boil, add the tea bag. Turn the heat off, close the pan and leave the tea infusing for 30 minutes. Squeeze the tea bag and remove it. Bring the cream to a gentle boil again, then pour 115g of it over the chocolate. Leave it for 5 minutes, gently whisk until smooth, add the corn syrup. Cool it until it gets to a good consistency for piping on the shells.

Make the macaron shells: Line 3 heavy baking sheets with parchment/baking paper or Silpat mats. Layer the powdered/icing sugar and ground almonds/almond meal in a food processor. Pulse until the mixture looks like fine meal, about 12 pulses. Pass through a sieve and transfer to a small bowl or to a sheet of parchment/baking paper. Set aside.

Place the egg whites and 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 in five additions, trying to aim the stream between the whisk and the side of the bowl. Turn the speed up to high. Continue to whip the meringue until it is soft and shiny. It should look like marshmallow creme (marshmallow fluff). Add the vanilla. 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 ground almond/almond meal mixture in two increments. When it is almost combined, divide the batter in two and add black food color to one portion. Proceed to mix the batters separately until they both reach proper texture for piping (batter should form a figure 8 on the surface as you drop it from a spatula). Put each mixture in a piping bag fitted with a round, ¼ inch tip. Pipe shells, using a little bit of one color, add the second on top, right in the center, then back to the first color, alternating in concentric circles. If desired, make a design with a needle. You need to work fast and pipe 4 to 6 shells before moving to a second batch.

Slam each sheet hard four to six times on the counter/worktop. 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 285 F (a lower temperature is better to keep the white color). Bake one sheet at a time on the middle rack. Check in 13 minutes. If the tops slide or move (independently of the 'feet' when you gently twist the top), then bake for 2 to 3 more minutes. Check one or two. If they move when gently touched, put them back in the oven for 1 to 2 more minutes until they don't move when touched. Let the macaroons cool for 10 minutes before removing from the pan. The macarons should release without sticking.

Assemble the macarons: find two macarons similar in size and add 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. Store in the fridge for 24 hours for perfect texture.