

***KANSAS SUNFLOWER SEED AND BLACK WALNUT MACARONS***  
*(from The Bewitching Kitchen)*

*For the shells:*

200g Icing/powdered sugar

100 g almond flour

15 g sunflower seeds, ground to a fine powder

115 g egg whites at room temperature (approx. 4 eggs)

1/8 tsp of cream of tartar

100 g granulated sugar

1/4 tsp vanilla paste or extract

green food color (I used green, brown and black to get a forest type green)

*for the filling:*

4 ounces cream cheese (half a regular package), softened

1/2 stick (1/4 cup) butter, room temperature

1/4 teaspoon black walnut extract (or vanilla)

225 g powdered sugar

1/3 cup ground Black Walnuts

*to decorate:*

2 cups (about 1/2 pound) powdered sugar

2 tablespoons warm water

1 + 1/2 tablespoons meringue powder

Make the decorations the day before. Beat all ingredients with a KitchenAid type mixer and the paddle attachment for about 7 minutes. Let the icing rest for 10 minutes, adjust consistency if needed. For piping rosettes, it must be thick but soft enough to squeeze through a small piping tip.

Color most of the icing yellow, color a small amount brown. Use a small leaf tip to make the petals. Add the center with a small icing tip. Pipe your shapes over parchment paper and allow to dry. If desired, brush some of the petals with bronze dust.

Make the shells:

Line 3 heavy baking sheets with parchment/baking paper or Silpat mats. Layer the powdered sugar, and ground almonds 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 and the food color. 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. 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 your choice of piping tip. Pipe shells, I like to count numbers in my head and use the same count for each shell so they end up similar in size.

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 300 F. Bake one sheet at a time on the middle rack. Check in 11 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.

For the black walnut buttercream: Add the cream cheese, butter and vanilla to the bowl of a KitchenAid type mixer and beat until very smooth. Slowly add powdered sugar, whisk until smooth and fluffy, then fold in the black walnuts.

Assemble the macarons: match two shells similar in size and add buttercream to the bottom of one of them. Place another shell on top and gently squeeze to take the filling all the way to the edge.

To decorate the macarons, add the Royal icing flowers on top using melted Candy melts or royal icing. Store the macs in the fridge for 24 hours for perfect texture.