

*baking school in-depth*

APRIL 2025

# ÉCLAIRS

Éclairs as we know them took shape in 19th-century France, but their roots run deeper. They began as *pain à la duchesse* or *petite duchesse*, elegant, elongated puffs of *pâte à choux*. But it was Marie-Antoine Carême—the chef who made pastry into an art—who refined the technique, bringing éclairs to their full potential. The term translates to “flash of lightning,” named perhaps because of their glossy sheen or maybe for the way they disappear in a delicious instant.

The magic of éclairs is in the making. *Pâte à choux* starts with humble ingredients but transforms in the oven, rising into golden shells that are crisp on the outside, airy and hollow within. Then comes the true indulgence: thick ribbons of vanilla-scented pastry cream, velvety and rich. Finally, a dark, bittersweet chocolate glaze—glossy as glass—draped over the top.

But tradition leaves room for wonderful variations. Take, for instance, the strawberry éclair—where the same crisp choux holds a cloud of strawberry-flavored whipped ganache, light yet decadent, its richness cut by the brightness of fresh berries. Instead of the deep, dark allure of chocolate, a strawberry glaze, vibrant and glistening, adds a touch of tart-sweet intensity.

These are pastries to savor, best enjoyed with good coffee, good company, and the kind of quiet satisfaction that comes from something truly well made.



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## THE COMPONENTS

**CHOUX PASTRY:** The foundation of an éclair is its *pâte à choux*—light, airy, and crisp. This unique dough relies on steam to expand, creating a hollow shell that’s sturdy enough to hold a lush filling while remaining delicate to the bite.

**FILLING:** We kept things classic with a silky vanilla pastry cream, but éclairs invite endless filling variations, like our Strawberry Whipped Ganache. Light yet indulgent, it’s accented by fresh berries for a touch of brightness—a filling that tastes like the warm days of spring.

**GLAZE:** The final flourish is a sleek, glossy topping that adds both flavor and finesse. The most traditional choice is a dark chocolate glaze, coating the pastry in a smooth, reflective sheen. For something a little different, consider a vibrant strawberry version. Its subtle sweetness and lustrous finish perfectly complement the Strawberry Whipped Ganache inside, capturing the essence of spring in every bite.

# INGREDIENT BREAKDOWN

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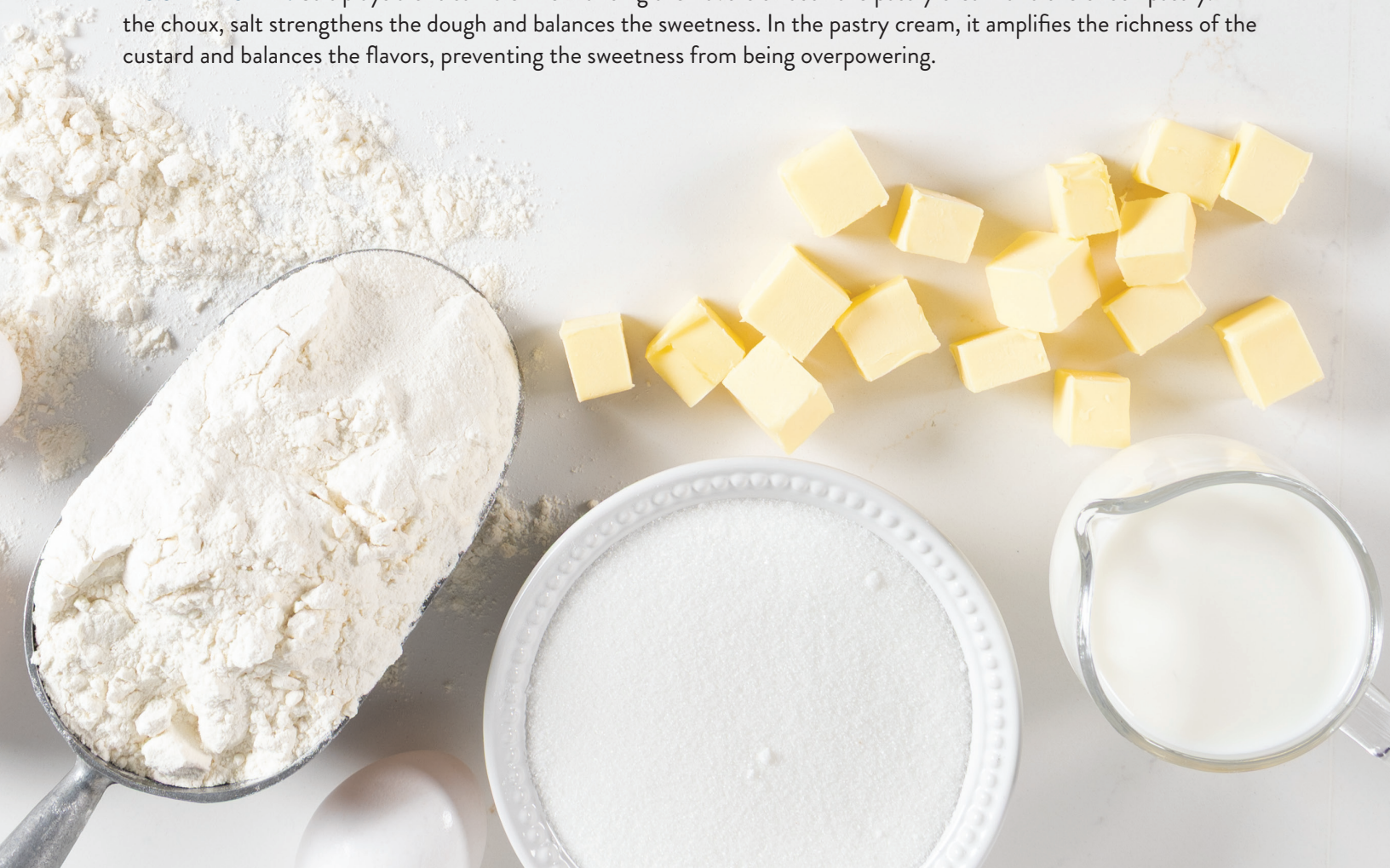
The éclairs' beauty lies in the balance of delicate choux pastry, rich pastry cream, and glossy ganache. Understanding the role of each ingredient ensures your éclairs will have the perfect texture, flavor, and structure.

**UNSALTED BUTTER:** Butter is a crucial ingredient in both the choux pastry and the ganache. In the choux, it creates a smooth dough and helps the pastry puff up during baking. It contributes to the rich, crisp exterior and soft interior while also helping with moisture balance and structure, ensuring the éclairs rise as they should. In the ganache, butter adds a glossy finish, guarantees smooth emulsification, and enriches the texture, contributing to the creamy consistency.

**WATER & WHOLE MILK:** Water is essential for generating steam in the choux pastry, which causes it to rise and form the light, airy structure we seek in an éclair. Milk, on the other hand, provides richness and moisture in both the choux pastry and the pastry cream. In the pastry cream, milk also helps with thickening the custard as it cooks, delivering the perfect smooth and velvety texture.

**GRANULATED SUGAR:** Sugar sweetens both the choux pastry and the pastry cream. In the pastry cream, it helps stabilize the egg yolks and thickens the custard. In the choux pastry, sugar adds subtle sweetness and encourages caramelization during baking, resulting in a crisp, golden-brown exterior.

**KOSHER SALT:** Salt plays a critical role in enhancing the flavors of both the pastry cream and the choux pastry. In the choux, salt strengthens the dough and balances the sweetness. In the pastry cream, it amplifies the richness of the custard and balances the flavors, preventing the sweetness from being overpowering.



# INGREDIENT BREAKDOWN

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**BREAD FLOUR:** Bread flour's higher protein content is ideal for choux pastry. The extra protein helps develop the dough's structure, which allows it to rise and hold its shape while forming a light, airy texture. This flour's elasticity also gives the pastry a slightly chewy, crisp bite once baked.

**EGGS:** Eggs are essential in both the choux pastry and the pastry cream. In the choux, eggs provide moisture and help the dough rise through steam during baking, giving the pastry its puffed-up shape. They also emulsify the dough for a smooth texture. In the pastry cream, egg yolks contribute to thickening the custard while also adding richness and creating a smooth, velvety texture.

**VANILLA EXTRACT:** Vanilla adds a rich, aromatic depth to both the pastry cream and the ganache. It elevates the overall flavor profile, complementing the richness of the pastry cream and the complexity of the ganache, contributing to a well-rounded, sophisticated taste.

**CORNSTARCH:** Cornstarch is crucial to the pastry cream. It absorbs moisture when heated and thickens the pastry cream, ensuring it remains smooth and velvety, without any lumps. This guarantees that the pastry cream holds its shape when piped into the éclairs, creating a creamy filling that isn't runny.

**SEMISWEET CHOCOLATE:** Semisweet chocolate gives the ganache its deep, rich flavor. The cocoa solids contribute to the slightly bitter, complex taste that pairs beautifully with the sweet pastry cream. The cocoa butter in the chocolate helps create a smooth, glossy texture that coats the éclairs perfectly.

**HEAVY WHIPPING CREAM:** The cream in the ganache is essential for emulsification, blending the chocolate into a silky, smooth glaze. It also adds richness, enhancing the ganache's overall texture, while the fat content makes for a gleaming glossy finish.



# TOOLS OF THE TRADE

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Every tool in your kitchen serves a purpose in the delicate dance of creating éclairs. Here's a selection to help you get the most out of each step—from baking the crisp *pâte à choux* to finishing with a glossy ganache glaze.

**STAND MIXER:** *Pâte à choux* can be laborious to handle by hand. A stand mixer makes the job easier, allowing you to beat in the eggs one by one while cooling the mixture. (Pictured: [KitchenAid® Artisan Stand Mixer, 5-Qt. in White/Silver.](#))

**WOODEN SPOON:** Old-school but indispensable, when you're mixing the flour into the bubbling butter and milk mixture, the gentle stir of a wooden spoon makes sure everything come together smoothly. (Pictured: [OXO Good Grips Large Wooden Spoon.](#))

**PASTRY BAG WITH PIPING TIPS:** For piping éclairs with precision, a large pastry bag fitted with a round open star piping tip helps create the perfect shape. The distinctive ridges make for a beautiful finish, and the technique gives you the control to pipe evenly sized éclairs and fill them with ease. (Pictured: [Ateco Open Star Pastry Tip #828](#) and [#824.](#))

**RIMMED BAKING SHEET:** Designed for even baking, this durable, aluminized steel pan is wonderful for achieving that perfect puff. (Pictured: [Williams Sonoma Goldtouch® Pro Nonstick Half Sheet.](#))

**FINE-MESH SIEVE:** For straining pastry cream and ganache, a fine-mesh sieve gives you a smooth, velvety texture. There's nothing worse than lumpy pastry cream, and this simple tool helps you avoid that fate. It's also invaluable when sifting the freeze-dried strawberries, making sure there are no large pieces in your Strawberry Whipped Ganache and Strawberry Glaze. (Pictured: [All-Clad Stainless-Steel Strainer, Set of 3.](#))

**SAUCEPAN:** A saucepan is a must for everything from the hot milk for pastry cream to the cream for ganache. A heavy-duty, heat-resistant saucepan ensures you can bring ingredients to the perfect temperature. (Pictured: [Williams Sonoma Signature Thermo-Clad™ Stainless-Steel Saucepan.](#))



**WHISK:** For smooth and lump-free pastry cream, a whisk is indispensable. It'll help you gently incorporate the warm milk mixture into the egg mixture, making sure everything comes together beautifully. (Pictured: [All-Clad Precision Stainless-Steel Balloon Whisk.](#))

**KITCHEN SHEARS:** Kitchen shears are perfect for cutting the parchment paper into even pieces to line your baking sheets and for snipping the pastry dough when piping the éclairs. (Pictured: [Zwilling Multi-Purpose Kitchen Shears.](#))

**MIXING BOWLS:** A set of sturdy mixing bowls is essential for keeping your ingredients organized. Whether you're stirring the pastry cream, melting chocolate for ganache, or assembling the whipped ganache, having the right bowls is crucial to maintaining smooth workflows. (Pictured: [Glass Mixing Bowl 10-Piece Set.](#))



ÉCLAIRS

## ÉCLAIRS

Makes about 15 pastries

- ½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, cubed
- ½ cup (120 grams) water
- ½ cup (120 grams) whole milk
- 2 teaspoons (8 grams) granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
- 1 cup (127 grams) bread flour
- 3 large eggs (150 grams), room temperature

Pastry Cream (recipe follows)

Ganache (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Using a permanent marker, draw 9 (4½-inch-long) lines at least 2 inches apart on each of 2 sheets of parchment paper. Place, marker side down, on 2 separate rimmed baking sheets.
2. In a medium saucepan, bring butter, ½ cup (120 grams) water, milk, sugar, and salt to a rolling boil over medium-high heat. Add flour, and stir with a wooden spoon until combined. Cook, stirring constantly, until a skin forms on bottom of pan and mixture pulls away from sides of pan and forms a ball, leaving a thin layer of residue on bottom of pan, 1 to 2 minutes.
3. Transfer mixture to the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment; beat at medium-low speed until dough cools slightly and is no longer steaming, 2 to 3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating until combined after each addition. (Batter will be shiny and thick.)
4. Transfer batter to a large pastry bag fitted with a large open star piping tip (Ateco #828). Holding bag at a 45-degree angle, slowly pipe along lines. (Piped batter should be ¾ to 1 inch thick.) Using a wet finger, smooth ends if necessary.
5. Bake, one pan at a time, for 15 minutes. Rotate pan, and bake until fully puffed and deep golden brown, 5 to 10 minutes more. (Let second pan stand at room temperature until ready to bake.) Let cool completely on pans.
6. Using a skewer, poke 2 holes about ¾ inch from ends on bottom of each éclair. Insert skewer into holes, and

move it around to ensure cream will fill entire éclair.

7. Spoon Pastry Cream into a pastry bag fitted with a large open star piping tip (Ateco #828). Place piping tip into a hole, and apply gentle pressure to begin filling éclair. Pipe cream into second hole until éclair feels heavy. Repeat with remaining éclairs.

8. Holding an éclair by bottom half and parallel to surface of Ganache, dip top of éclair in Ganache. Still parallel, lift éclair out of Ganache. Then slowly lift one end of éclair, letting excess Ganache run off. Repeat with remaining éclairs. Let stand at room temperature or refrigerate until set. Best served same day as made.

**PRO TIPS:** Baked, unfilled éclairs can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for 2 to 3 days or frozen for up to 1 month. Thaw and refresh in oven at 375°F (190°C) for 5 to 10 minutes.

Unbaked, piped éclairs can be frozen and stored for up to 1 month. To bake from frozen, place 2 inches apart on a lined baking sheet, and bake at 375°F (190°C) for 15 minutes. Rotate pan, and bake until golden brown, 10 to 15 minutes more.

Moisture content in the dough can vary depending on the weight of the eggs and the amount of steam lost during cooking and cooling. Be cautious when adding eggs—if the batter becomes too loose, it will be impossible to pipe. On the other hand, not enough eggs can prevent the choux from puffing properly. Keep an eye on the consistency to ensure the perfect texture for piping and baking.

### Pastry Cream

Makes about 1¼ cups

- 3 cups (720 grams) whole milk
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar, divided
- 2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
- 8 large egg yolks (149 grams)
- 7 tablespoons (56 grams) cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt
- ¼ cup (57 grams) unsalted butter, softened



1. In a large saucepan, whisk together milk, ½ cup (100 grams) sugar, and vanilla. Heat over medium heat until steaming. (Do not boil.)
2. In a large bowl, whisk together egg yolks, cornstarch, salt, and remaining ½ cup (100 grams) sugar. Gradually add warm milk mixture, whisking constantly. Pour egg yolk mixture into saucepan, and cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until thickened and boiling, 4 to 5 minutes.
3. Strain mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl. Stir in butter in two additions. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing wrap directly onto surface of pastry cream to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate until cold, about 4 hours, or overnight.

### Ganache

Makes about 1¼ cups

- 5 ounces (142 grams) semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 1 tablespoon (14 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons (150 grams) heavy whipping cream, room temperature

1. In a heatproof bowl, place chopped chocolate, butter, and salt.
2. In a small saucepan, heat cream over medium-low heat just until it begins to steam. (Do not boil.) Pour hot cream onto chocolate mixture. Let stand for 5 minutes; stir until smooth. Use immediately

## STRAWBERRY ÉCLAIRS

Makes about 15 pastries

Éclairs (recipe on page 7)

Strawberry Whipped Ganache (recipe follows)

1 cup (176 grams) finely diced fresh strawberries

Strawberry Glaze (recipe follows)

1. Using a small serrated knife, carefully cut cooled Éclairs in half horizontally.
2. Spoon Strawberry Whipped Ganache into a pastry bag fitted with a small open star piping tip (Ateco #824). Pipe ganache onto bottom half of each éclair. Top each with 1 tablespoon (11 grams) diced strawberries.
3. Dip top half of éclairs into Strawberry Glaze, and place, glaze side up, on top of strawberries. Serve immediately, or refrigerate for up to 1 day. Best served same day as made.

### Strawberry Whipped Ganache

Makes about 3½ cups

- ½ pound (227 grams) fresh strawberries, hulled
- 1½ tablespoons (31.5 grams) light corn syrup

- 12 ounces (340 grams) white chocolate, chopped
- 2 tablespoons (10 grams) sifted powdered freeze-dried strawberries
- 1½ cups (360 grams) heavy whipping cream

1. In the work bowl of a food processor, pulse fresh strawberries until almost smooth (a few small pieces should remain). Transfer to a medium saucepan, and stir in corn syrup. Bring to a boil over medium heat.
2. In a large heatproof bowl, place white chocolate and powdered strawberries. Pour hot strawberry mixture onto chocolate mixture; let stand for 5 minutes. Stir with a spatula until smooth and emulsified. Whisk in cream. Cover and refrigerate until set, at least 5 hours, or up to overnight.
3. Spoon ganache into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Beat at low speed until ganache becomes thick and holds its shape, 2 to 4 minutes. Use immediately, or refrigerate for up to 2 days. If refrigerated, rewhip ganache by hand before using.

### Strawberry Glaze

Makes about 1½ cups

- 1 cup (120 grams) confectioners' sugar
- ¼ cup (20 grams) sifted powdered freeze-dried strawberries
- 3 tablespoons (45 grams) whole milk

1. In a small bowl, whisk together confectioners' sugar and powdered strawberries; whisk in milk until smooth and well combined.



# MAKING THE CHOUX



Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Using a permanent marker, draw 9 (4½-inch-long) lines at least 2 inches apart on each of 2 sheets of parchment paper. Place, marker side down, on 2 separate rimmed baking sheets.

In a medium saucepan, bring butter, ½ cup (120 grams) water, milk, sugar, and salt to a rolling boil over medium-high heat. Add flour, and stir with a wooden spoon until combined. Cook, stirring constantly, until a skin forms on bottom of pan and mixture pulls away from sides of pan and forms a ball, leaving a thin layer of residue on bottom of pan, 1 to 2 minutes.

Transfer mixture to the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment; beat at medium-low speed until dough cools slightly and is no longer steaming, 2 to 3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating until combined after each addition. (Batter will be shiny and thick.)

# PIPING THE CHOUX



Transfer batter to a large pastry bag fitted with a large open star piping tip (Ateco #828). Holding bag at a 45-degree angle, slowly pipe along lines. (Piped batter should be  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 inch thick.) Using a wet finger, smooth ends if necessary.

Bake, one pan at a time, for 15 minutes. Rotate pan, and bake until fully puffed and deep golden brown, 5 to 10 minutes more. (Let second pan stand at room temperature until ready to bake.) Let cool completely on pans.

# FILLING THE ÉCLAIRS

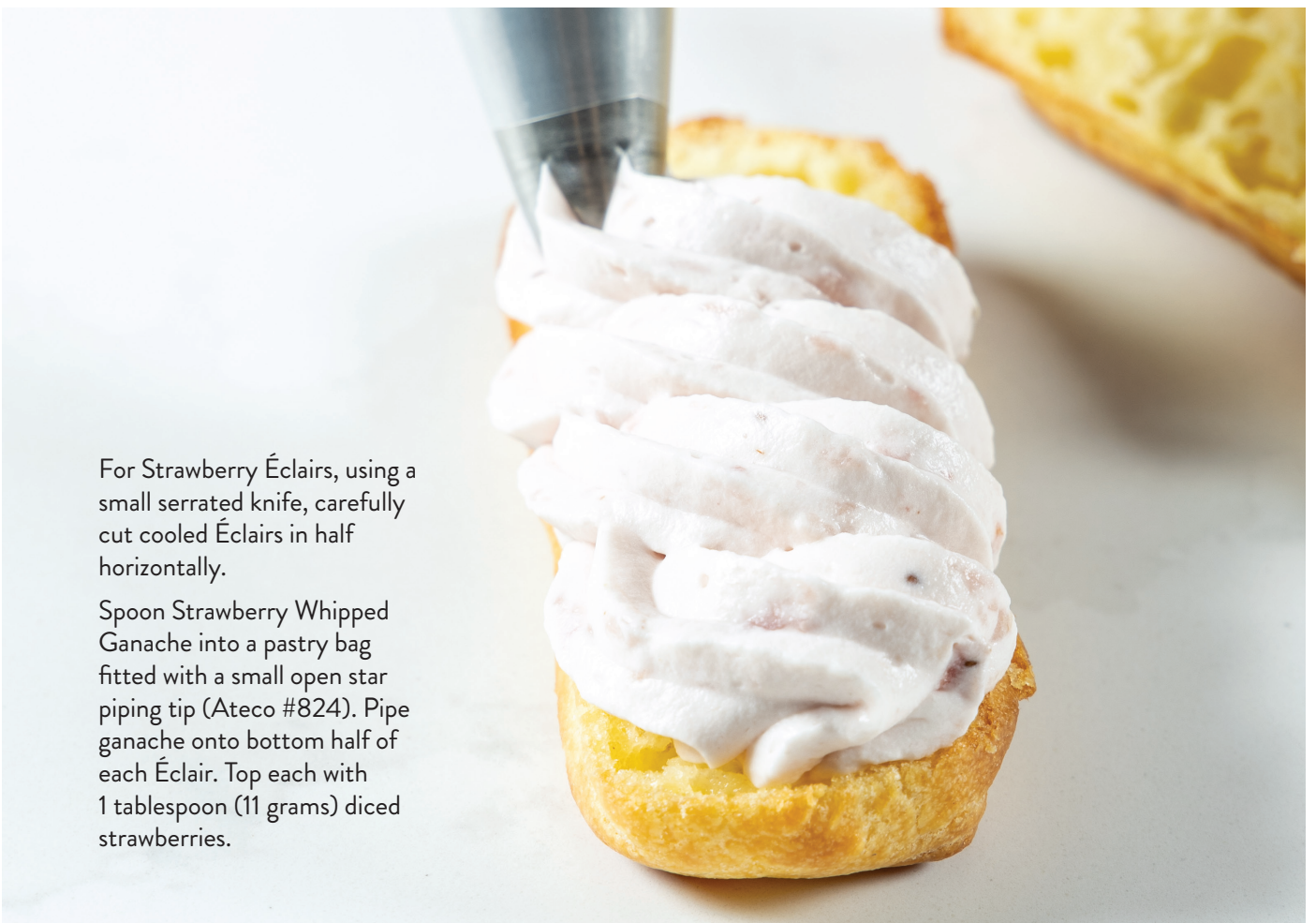
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Using a skewer, poke 2 holes about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch from ends on bottom of each éclair. Insert skewer into holes, and move it around to ensure cream will fill entire éclair.



Spoon Pastry Cream into a pastry bag fitted with a large open star piping tip (Ateco #828). Place piping tip into a hole, and apply gentle pressure to begin filling éclair. Pipe cream into second hole until éclair feels heavy. Repeat with remaining éclairs.



For Strawberry Éclairs, using a small serrated knife, carefully cut cooled Éclairs in half horizontally.

Spoon Strawberry Whipped Ganache into a pastry bag fitted with a small open star piping tip (Ateco #824). Pipe ganache onto bottom half of each Éclair. Top each with 1 tablespoon (11 grams) diced strawberries.

# GLAZING THE ÉCLAIRS

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Holding an éclair by its bottom half and parallel to surface of Ganache, dip top of éclair in Ganache. Still parallel, lift éclair out of Ganache. Then slowly lift one end of éclair, letting excess Ganache run off. Repeat with remaining éclairs. Let stand at room temperature or refrigerate until set.

For Strawberry Éclairs, dip top half of éclairs into Strawberry Glaze, and place, glaze side up, on top of strawberries. Serve immediately, or refrigerate for up to 1 day.

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