

# APRIL

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## Baking School In-Depth: Île Flottante

The origin of this beloved French dessert can be traced back to 1651, when François-Pierre de la Varenne, the father of classic French cuisine, recorded the first recipe in his cookbook *Les Cuisinier François* for *oeufs à la neige*, or “eggs in the snow,” which was made without custard. Instead, he created piles of egg whites adorned with egg yolks. Over time, the egg yolks became part of a luscious vanilla custard called *crème anglaise*, creating the French dessert now considered a classic.

Our version stays true to this timeless dessert with its delightful combination of softly poached meringue puffs floating in a pool of velvety, smooth *crème anglaise*. The *crème anglaise* begins its journey as the poaching liquid for the meringues and is transmuted into a rich and creamy custard, perfectly complementing the airy meringue. Caramelized almonds add a lovely textural contrast and final touch of sophistication. Follow along as we guide you through the straightforward process of making these impressive and effortless Îles Flottantes.



# INGREDIENT BREAKDOWN

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Excellent recipes require wonderful ingredients. Here's how our recipe's ingredients contribute to making Île Flottante.

**EGG WHITES:** Water and protein make up egg whites, and when whipped, the protein and water molecules combine to create a stable foam. Eggs are easier to separate when cold but whip up faster and with more volume at room temperature. Separate your eggs when cold and let the whites stand to come to room temperature. Make sure there's no yolk in your egg whites, as fat inhibits the whites from whipping.

**CREAM OF TARTAR:** Cream of tartar stabilizes the whipped egg whites by keeping the proteins in the egg whites from sticking to each other, helping them hold their volume and providing impressive lift to the meringues.

**KOSHER SALT:** Our salt of choice, kosher salt is a pure, mined, additive-free salt that dissolves readily and has a crisp, clean taste. It's flaked rather than granulated, which allows for more-even distribution in each component of our Île Flottante.

**GRANULATED SUGAR:** Adding sugar does more than add sweetness; it serves as a stabilizer to keep the meringue from collapsing, helps prevent the crème anglaise from curdling, and adds a caramelized flavor and golden-brown color to the Candied Almonds.

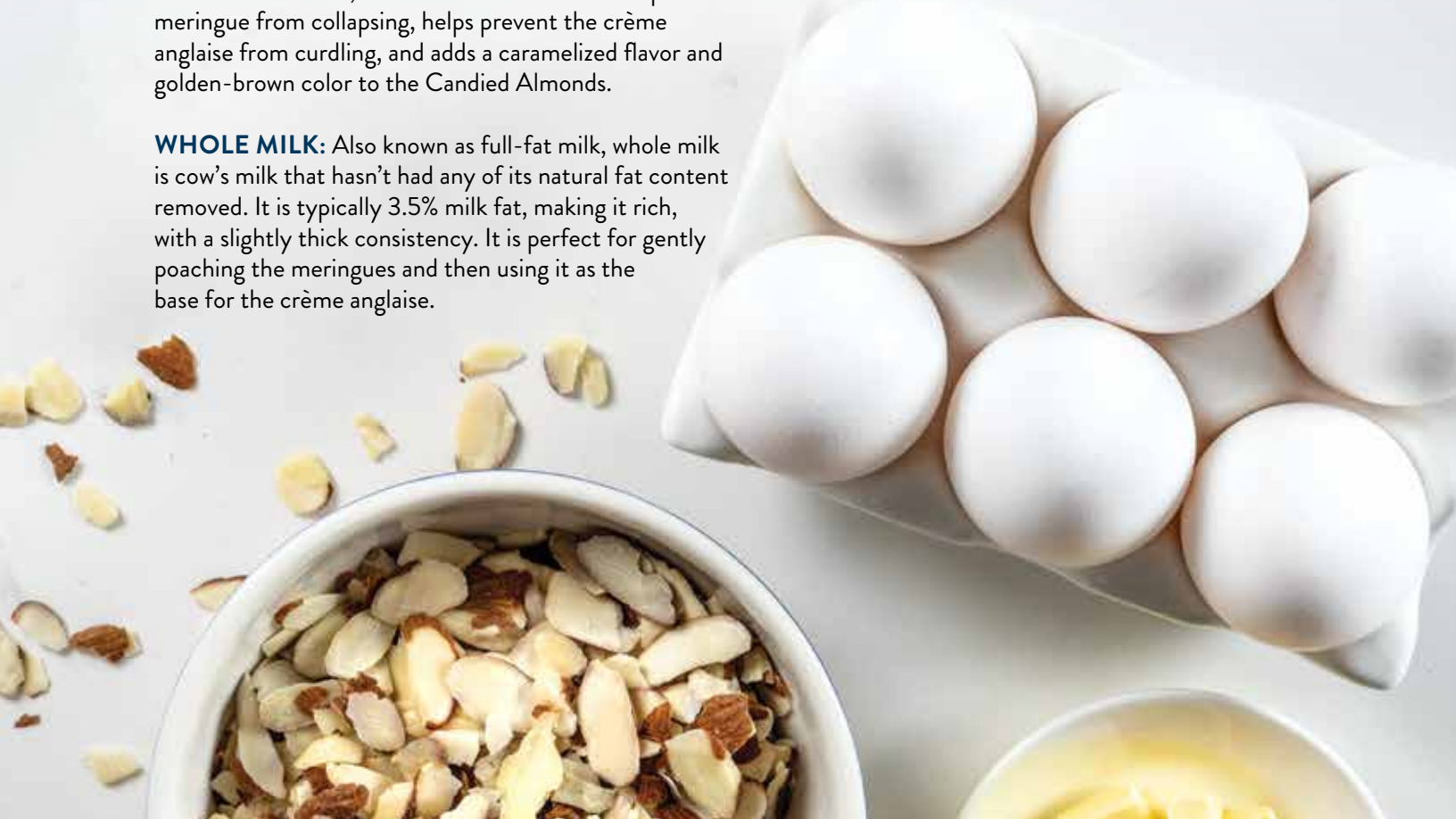
**WHOLE MILK:** Also known as full-fat milk, whole milk is cow's milk that hasn't had any of its natural fat content removed. It is typically 3.5% milk fat, making it rich, with a slightly thick consistency. It is perfect for gently poaching the meringues and then using it as the base for the crème anglaise.

**HEAVY WHIPPING CREAM:** In addition to the whole milk, heavy whipping cream also improves the texture and overall decadence of the crème anglaise.

**EGG YOLKS:** The crème anglaise owes its rich, smooth texture to the magical emulsifying properties of egg yolks, which contain a lipid called lecithin. As the yolks coagulate, the protein structure changes due to heat, resulting in a runny mixture slowly transforming into a velvety, thick sauce. Additionally, the egg yolks are responsible for the iconic pale-yellow color of the crème anglaise.

**VANILLA BEAN:** We love using the seeds scraped from a flavorful and incredibly aromatic vanilla bean for a lovely, speckled appearance and classic concentrated flavor. If you don't have a vanilla bean on hand, you can substitute vanilla bean paste.

**SLICED ALMONDS:** Almonds are a classic addition to this timeless French dessert. As a final flourish scattered onto fluffy meringues and silky crème anglaise, they create a delicious contrast of texture and flavor.



# TOOL TÊTE-À-TÊTE

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We recommend this set of tools for our technique

**SHALLOW SAUCEPAN:** For best results when poaching meringues, we use a wide, shallow saucepan that provides enough space for them to puff up and cook without sticking together. (Pictured: [Williams Sonoma Signature Thermo-Clad™ Stainless-Steel Sauté Pan, 4½-Qt.](#))

**SKILLET:** You want a stainless steel skillet that will heat efficiently and evenly with precise temperature control and no hot spots when creating the Candied Almonds. (Pictured: [Williams Sonoma Signature Thermo-Clad™ Stainless-Steel Fry Pan, 10”.](#))

**FINE-MESH SIEVE:** For the silky-smooth crème anglaise, we love this heavy-duty stainless steel strainer. It's fitted with ergonomically shaped handles that make it comfortable to lift and hold when straining out any excess meringue from the poaching liquid and straining the custard to remove any bits of egg that may not have emulsified to ensure its velvety texture. (Pictured: [All-Clad 3-Piece Stainless-Steel Strainer Set.](#))

**INSTANT-READ THERMOMETER:** We use an instant-read thermometer to ensure the custard mixture reaches the perfect temperature when making the crème anglaise. (Pictured: [Thermapen® ONE.](#))

**WHISK:** A balloon whisk, with its amply spaced wires, helps keep the crème anglaise in constant motion while cooking. (Pictured: [All-Clad Precision Stainless-Steel Balloon Whisk.](#))

**RIMMED BAKING SHEET:** A rimmed baking sheet has endless kitchen uses, and for this recipe, it's the perfect spot for the poached meringues to cool while finishing the crème anglaise. (Pictured: [Williams Sonoma Goldtouch® Pro Nonstick Non Corrugated Half Sheet.](#))



**GLASS BOWLS, SPATULA, MEASURING CUP, SERVING SPOON, AND SLOTTED SPOON:** For all your baking needs, you really can't beat the basics. Glass bowls give you a 360-degree visual in every step of this recipe. A silicone spatula is perfect for simple stirring and ensuring you get every bit of the meringue out of the bowl. Using a sturdy measuring cup with a handle makes pouring the cooled crème anglaise into the serving bowls a cinch. A large serving spoon is perfect for gently placing the meringues into the poaching liquid, and a slotted spoon is the ideal tool to tenderly scoop them out. (Pictured: [Glass Mixing Bowl 10-Piece Set, OXO 3-Piece Angled Measuring Cups, Williams Sonoma Silicone Spatula with Stainless-Steel Handle, OXO Stainless-Steel Utensils with Utensil Holder, Set of 15.](#))



ÎLE FLOTTANTE

## ÎLE FLOTTANTE

Makes 6 servings

*Île flottante, or floating island, is an ethereal French dessert. The velvety, cool pool of vanilla bean seed-speckled crème anglaise is topped with a delicate and airy French meringue and is perfectly balanced with a crown of slightly bitter and crunchy Candied Almonds.*

- 6 large eggs (300 grams), separated and room temperature
  - ½ teaspoon kosher salt, divided
  - ¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
  - 1⅓ cups (266 grams) plus ½ cup (100 grams) granulated sugar, divided
  - 1½ cups (360 grams) whole milk, divided
  - 1 cup (240 grams) heavy whipping cream
  - 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise, seeds scraped and reserved (or 1½ teaspoons [9 grams] vanilla bean paste)
- Candied Almonds (recipe follows), to serve

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat egg whites, ¼ teaspoon salt, and cream of tartar at medium speed until frothy. With mixer on medium speed, gradually add 1⅓ cups (266 grams) sugar, a few tablespoons at a time. Slowly increase mixer speed to high, and beat until medium-stiff peaks form, 3 to 4 minutes.
2. In a large shallow saucepan, heat 1 cup (240 grams) milk, cream, ¼ cup (50 grams) sugar, and vanilla bean and reserved seeds over medium-low heat, stirring frequently, just until steaming. (Do not boil.) Reduce heat to low, and

maintain a gentle simmer. (Do not let the milk mixture come to a boil. If the mixture becomes too hot, it will scald and the meringues will puff too much and overcook.)

3. Gently spoon 2 to 3 scoops of meringue directly on top of each other (for height) to equal ½ cup (65 grams) into heated milk mixture. Cover and steam meringues for 2 to 3 minutes. (They will spread slightly and be shiny but hold their shape. They are easier to handle when cooled completely, so using a spatula to remove them from the cream mixture may be easier if your meringue spreads wider than a slotted spoon.) Using a slotted spoon or large slotted spatula, remove meringues, and transfer to a paper towel-lined baking sheet. Repeat with remaining meringue. Let cool completely.

4. In a medium bowl, whisk together egg yolks, remaining ¼ cup (50 grams) sugar, and remaining ¼ teaspoon salt.

5. Strain warm milk mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into egg yolk mixture, discarding solids. Whisk until well combined. Return mixture to saucepan, and add remaining ½ cup (120 grams) milk, whisking constantly. Cook over medium-low heat, whisking constantly, until mixture begins to thicken and coats the back of a spoon and an instant-read thermometer registers 180°F (82°C). Strain crème anglaise through a clean fine-mesh sieve into a medium bowl or large liquid-measuring cup. Cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until cool, at least 1 hour.

6. To serve, pour about ½ cup (about 72 grams) crème anglaise in each serving dish, and top with

meringue. Sprinkle with Candied Almonds. Serve immediately.

## CANDIED ALMONDS

Makes about ½ cup

- 1 teaspoon (4 grams) unsalted butter
- ½ cup (57 grams) sliced almonds
- 1½ tablespoons (18 grams) granulated sugar
- ⅛ teaspoon kosher salt

1. In a large skillet, melt butter over medium-high heat. Stir in almonds, sugar, and salt until combined. Cook until sugar is melted and caramelized, 2 to 4 minutes. Immediately pour onto parchment paper, and carefully separate almonds while still warm. Let cool completely. Store in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

## OEUFS À LA NEIGE VS. ÎLE FLOTTANTE

Though the terms *oeufs à la neige* and *île flottante* are used interchangeably, they have subtle differences. *Oeufs à la neige* are usually served in a large bowl with a few small egg-shaped meringues, while *île flottante* is one giant meringue luxuriating in a pool of custard.



# MAKING THE MERINGUE

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1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat egg whites,  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt, and cream of tartar at medium speed until frothy. With mixer on medium speed, gradually add  $\frac{1}{3}$  cups (266 grams) sugar, a few tablespoons at a time. Slowly increase mixer speed to high, and beat until medium-stiff peaks form, 3 to 4 minutes. It's important to add sugar at the right time when making French meringue. Adding sugar after the egg whites become frothy creates a thick, satiny foam that will remain even after you stop whisking. If you add sugar before the egg whites reach the frothy point, the meringue won't whip up properly.

# POACHING THE MERINGUES

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1. In a large shallow saucepan, heat 1 cup (240 grams) milk, cream,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup (50 grams) sugar, and vanilla bean and reserved seeds over medium-low heat, stirring frequently, just until steaming. (Do not boil.) Reduce heat to low, and maintain a gentle simmer. (Do not let the milk mixture come to a boil. If the mixture becomes too hot, it will scald and the meringues will puff too much and overcook.)

2. Gently spoon 2 to 3 scoops of meringue directly on top of each other (for height) to equal  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (65 grams) into heated milk mixture. Cover and steam meringues for 2 to 3 minutes. (They will spread slightly and be shiny but hold their shape. They are easier to handle when cooled completely, so using a spatula to remove them from the cream mixture may be easier if your meringue spreads wider than a slotted spoon.) Using a slotted spoon or large slotted spatula, remove meringues, and transfer to a paper towel-lined baking sheet. Repeat with remaining meringues. Let cool completely. Covering the pan when cooking steams the meringues beautifully and prevents the need to turn them, resulting in effortlessly poached meringue islands.

# CREATING THE CRÈME ANGLAISE

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1. In a medium bowl, whisk together egg yolks, remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup (50 grams) sugar, and remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt.
2. Strain warm milk mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into egg yolk mixture, discarding solids. Whisk until well combined. Return mixture to saucepan, and add remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (120 grams) milk, whisking constantly. Cook over medium-low heat, whisking constantly, until mixture begins to thicken and coats the back of a spoon and an instant-read thermometer registers 180°F (82°C). Strain crème anglaise through a clean fine-mesh sieve into a medium bowl or large liquid-measuring cup. Cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until cool, at least 1 hour. When preparing crème anglaise, it is essential to keep whisking the mixture. This will guarantee that the custard thickens uniformly, as it tends to thicken more at the base, corners, and sides of the pan where there is more direct heat. Whisking also ensures that the custard is heated evenly so that no part of it scalds. To check whether the crème anglaise has thickened to the ideal consistency, dip a spoon or spatula into the mixture and then run your finger through the mixture on the utensil. If the line made by your finger stays, the mixture has thickened to the correct consistency, also known as the “nappe consistency.”



# MAKING THE CANDIED ALMONDS



1. In a large skillet, melt butter over medium-high heat. Stir in almonds, sugar, and salt until combined. Cook until sugar is melted and caramelized, 2 to 4 minutes. Immediately pour onto parchment paper, and carefully separate almonds while still warm. Let cool completely. Store in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

# THE ASSEMBLY

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1. To serve, pour about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (about 72 grams) crème anglaise in each serving dish, and top with meringue. Sprinkle with Candied Almonds. Serve immediately. Using a long, wide spatula makes transferring the fluffy meringue onto the custard a breeze.

