

MARCH

Spring Macarons

Meet the macaron challenge with fearlessness! This classic French dessert is a simple formula of almond flour, sugar, and egg whites but requires an involved process that yields an exquisite payoff. Our step-by-step guide will walk you through every part of the process, from whipping the meringue to mixing and piping the batter, and we'll provide you with expert tips and techniques along with helpful photos. Aided by Bob's Red Mill

Super-Fine Almond Flour, our delicate macarons are speckled with rich vanilla bean seeds and filled with a luscious Strawberry Buttercream—the perfect recipe to begin exploring the grand, adventurous world of French macarons.



INGREDIENT BREAKDOWN

Great recipes require great ingredients. Here's how each key ingredient helps create a mighty macaron.

CONFECTIONERS' SUGAR: Also known as powdered sugar, confectioners' sugar contains 3% cornstarch to help prevent clumping (or caking). Essentially granulated sugar that has been ground into a fine powder, it comes in varying degrees of fineness (6X, 10X, 12X). The most common and the one you'll find at the grocery store is 10X, best for items that need the sugar to melt quickly. Because the confectioners' sugar is quickly absorbed, it helps keep us from overmixing our macaron batter.

BOB'S RED MILL SUPER-FINE ALMOND FLOUR: Also called almond meal, almond flour is made from blanched whole almonds that have been ground down. This fine meal is easier to sift and has a pale color due to the use of blanched almonds, which are almonds that are blanched in order to remove their skins. Inherently gluten-free, almond flour is a favorite for bakers with gluten allergies. To keep it at peak freshness, almond flour is best stored in the refrigerator or freezer.

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 is flaked rather than granulated, which allows for more even distribution.

EGG WHITES: Egg whites are composed of water and protein. When whipped, the protein and water molecules bond together to create a stable foam, and once sugar is added, a fluffy meringue is born. Eggs are easier to separate when cold but whip up better at room temperature, whipping faster and providing more volume, so separate your eggs ahead of time.

GRANULATED SUGAR: The most common form of sugar used, highly refined white sugar is made from sugarcane or sugar beets. The removal of molasses and impurities leaves the sugar white. We add a touch of it in a steady stream while whipping our egg whites to create a classic French meringue.

VANILLA BEAN PASTE AND VANILLA EXTRACT: Vanilla bean paste is a viscous combination of vanilla extract and vanilla bean seeds. We like to use it for its lovely speckled appearance and concentrated flavor. A boost of pure vanilla extract helps round out the intense vanilla flavor.



MERINGUE MATRIX

Three kinds of meringue, each with its own specific positive qualities, can be used to make macarons. We break down the three choices and why we went with the classic French meringue.

ITALIAN MERINGUE: To make a classic Italian meringue, you heat granulated sugar and water on the stove until the sugar melts, making a simple syrup (usually heated until an instant-read thermometer registers 240°F [115°C]). Meanwhile, you whip your egg whites with a bit of cream of tartar until soft peaks form. Then you add the sugar syrup to the whipped egg white mixture in a slow, steady stream, beating until glossy, stiff peaks form. Bakers like this meringue because it is very stable and can withstand some intense mixing. However, using this technique won't give your French macarons their classic delicate texture and can sometimes make them overly sweet.

SWISS MERINGUE: For Swiss meringue, you heat your egg whites and granulated sugar in the top of a double boiler until the sugar melts and an instant-read thermometer registers 120°F (49°C) to 130°F (54°C). Once the mixture reaches this temperature range, it is whipped to glossy, stiff peaks. On the plus side, this method also creates a stiff meringue that can handle a heavy hand for mixing. But it can be difficult to pipe a Swiss meringue, and when baked, it won't possess that traditional French macaron texture.

FRENCH MERINGUE: The original meringue behind the macaron, a French meringue is a simple combination of room temperature egg whites and granulated sugar, no heating required. Egg whites are whipped until frothy and then sugar is added in a slow, steady stream so it dissolves into the still-moist egg whites, beating until stiff peaks form. Why did we select this method? It's simple, requiring no extra equipment or time on the stove, and it's the only meringue that will yield the ideal, classic macaron texture (smooth, crisp top paired with a delicately chewy interior) and just-sweet-enough taste.





VANILLA BEAN MACARONS WITH STRAWBERRY BUTTERCREAM

Makes about 33 macarons

A traditional French meringue receives a gentle fold-in of confectioners' sugar and superior Bob's Red Mill Super-Fine Almond Flour to create the most delicate and delicious macarons. Filled with a bright and blushing pink Strawberry Buttercream, these macarons are made with an accessible recipe that'll usher you into the sweet art of French pâtisserie.

- 1¾ cups plus 3 tablespoons (231 grams) confectioners' sugar
 - 1½ cups (144 grams) Bob's Red Mill Super-Fine Almond Flour
 - ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
 - ½ cup (120 grams) egg whites, room temperature (about 4 large egg whites)
 - 3½ tablespoons (42 grams) granulated sugar
 - 1 teaspoon (6 grams) vanilla bean paste
 - ¼ teaspoon (1 gram) vanilla extract
- Strawberry Buttercream** (recipe follows)

1. Line 2 to 3 rimmed baking sheets with nonstick baking mats. Using a permanent marker, draw 1½-inch circles 1 inch apart on a sheet of parchment paper. Place template under 1 nonstick baking mat.

2. In the work bowl of a food processor, place confectioners' sugar, flour, and salt; process until well combined. Sift confectioners' sugar mixture using a fine-mesh sieve. (If you do not have a food processor, sift together confectioners' sugar, flour, and salt three times.)

3. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat egg whites at medium-high speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Add granulated sugar in a slow, steady stream. Increase mixer speed to high, and beat until stiff peaks form, about 2 minutes. Gently fold in confectioners' sugar mixture in three additions. Right before mixture is completely combined, fold in vanilla bean paste and vanilla extract. (Properly folded macaron batter will move in a fluid, slow-moving ribbon.)

4. Transfer batter to a piping bag fitted with a medium round tip (Ateco #804). Holding tip perpendicular to pan, pipe batter onto drawn circles of template underneath mat. Apply pressure to bag, leaving tip stationary, until batter reaches drawn circle. Release pressure, and move piping tip in a quick circular motion as you finish piping each macaron shell to prevent a point from forming on top. Remove template, and place under second baking mat to pipe batter. Repeat procedure with remaining batter. Slam pans vigorously on counter 5 to 7 times, rotating pan 180 degrees each time, to release air bubbles. Let stand at room temperature until a skin forms on top of macaron shells, about 45 minutes to 1 hour. (The batter should feel dry to the touch and should not stick to your finger.)

5. Preheat oven to 275°F (140°C).

6. Bake in batches until firm to the touch, 14 to 15 minutes, rotating pan every 5 minutes. Let cool completely on pans.

7. Place Strawberry Buttercream in a piping bag fitted with a small round tip (Ateco #802). Pipe buttercream onto flat side of half of macaron shells. Place remaining macaron shells, flat side down, on top of buttercream. Macarons are best enjoyed the same day they are made, but can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

STRAWBERRY BUTTERCREAM

Makes about 3 cups

- 1 cup (227 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 16 ounces (454 grams) confectioners' sugar
- ⅓ cup (107 grams) strawberry preserves
- 2 tablespoons (30 grams) heavy whipping cream
- ¼ teaspoon (1 gram) vanilla extract

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter and salt at low speed until smooth. Slowly add confectioners' sugar, about 1 cup (120 grams) at a time, alternately with preserves, about 2 tablespoons (40 grams) at a time, and cream, beating until smooth after each addition. Increase mixer speed to medium, and beat until smooth and fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes. Beat in vanilla.



A CLOSER LOOK

PREP

Get your ingredients and baking pans ready for flawless macarons

HOW: Line 2 to 3 rimmed baking sheets with nonstick baking mats. Using a permanent marker, draw 1½-inch circles 1 inch apart on a sheet of parchment paper. Place template under 1 nonstick baking mat.

WHY: We use nonstick baking mats instead of parchment paper because the macaron shells can stick to parchment and not rise properly in the oven. Mats also allow for a clean release. Meanwhile, the template helps you keep your piping consistent and ensures each macaron shell is the same size.



HOW: In the work bowl of a food processor, place confectioners' sugar, flour, and salt; process until well combined. Sift confectioners' sugar mixture using a fine-mesh sieve. (If you do not have a food processor, sift together confectioners' sugar, flour, and salt three times.)

WHY: The food processor will help remove any lumps and aerate the dry ingredients before you fold them into the egg white mixture. Specifically, the food processor speeds up the process, so you don't have to sift the dry ingredients three times. However, if you don't have a food processor, sifting three times will create the same results.



EXPERT TIP

We love using a tamis sifter (pronounced “tammy”), a flat-bottomed sifter shaped similarly to a snare drum. Using a bowl scraper or a spatula, you can push and sift your dry ingredients into a large bowl with ease and very little mess.

MAKING MERINGUE MAGIC

Whip your egg whites into majestic stiff peaks

THE METHOD: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat egg whites at medium-high speed until foamy, about 1 minute. When they are whisked, the proteins unravel and rise to the surface of the bubbles created and latch onto one another. A flexible film is formed, and the film is the meringue. Add granulated sugar in a slow, steady stream. Increase mixer speed to high and beat until stiff peaks form, about 2 minutes. Adding the sugar in a slow, steady stream allows it to be incorporated correctly and dissolve into the whites. If added all at once or too quickly, it will destroy the film you are trying to create.

STIFF PEAK CHECK: How do you know when your meringue is ready? You can overwhip your whites, which has negative effects on the cookies. Whites should be shiny and smooth, not grainy or dry. To know when you have proper stiff peaks, lift the whisk out and check to see if the peak points upward or only has a slight bend. You can also turn the bowl upside down, and if the meringue stays steadily in place and doesn't fall out, you'll know it's ready. If your meringue starts to look clotted or textured, you have overwhipped it and should start the process over. Now that you've whipped it, use it immediately. Your meringue will begin to deflate and separate with every minute you wait.



EXPERT TIP

Any fat will interfere, so it is important that your hands, bowl, and whisk attachment are very clean. Also, when separating the eggs, you must ensure that no yolk gets into the whites. To combat this, separate your eggs when they are still cold, making it is easier to separate the white from the yolk.



BATTER UP

The delicate process of incorporating your dry ingredients into your freshly whipped French meringue, demystified



THE METHOD: Gently fold in confectioners' sugar mixture in three additions. Adding the confectioners' sugar mixture slowly in three additions ensures an even and thorough incorporation into the batter. If you add it all at once, it will overwhelm the whites and will be too hard to fold in correctly. If the dry ingredients are not folding in easily, let the mixture stand for 30 seconds. This will give it time to hydrate and will make it easier to fold in. Right before mixture is completely combined, fold in vanilla bean paste and vanilla extract. Keep folding—lifting and tucking the mixture in a “J” motion—until you reach the ribbon stage. Properly folded macaron batter will move in a fluid, slow-moving ribbon, like sweet lava.

PERFECTING PIPING

Even pressure and steady hands are the keys to piping perfect macaron shells

THE METHOD: For a mess-free batter transfer, place piping bag in a large jar or glass and fold the bag edges over the lip of the glass before spooning in batter. Transfer batter to a piping bag fitted with a medium round tip (Ateco #804). Using a medium tip is important because if it is too big, it will not help push air out while the batter is being piped, leaving air bubbles in the batter. Holding tip perpendicular to pan, pipe batter onto drawn circles of template underneath mat. Apply pressure to bag, leaving tip stationary, until batter reaches drawn circle. If you move around while piping, the top won't be smooth. Release pressure, and move piping tip in a quick circular motion as you finish piping each macaron shell to prevent a tip from forming on top. Remove template, and place under second baking mat to pipe batter. Repeat procedure with remaining batter. Slam pans vigorously on counter 5 to 7 times, rotating pan 180 degrees each time, to release air bubbles.

REST TIME: Let stand at room temperature until a skin forms on top of macaron shells, about 45 minutes to 1 hour. (The batter should feel dry to the touch and should not stick to your finger.) The time will depend on the environment in which it is resting. For example, if it is humid, it will take longer for the batter to set up. This wait time gives the cookies their signature crunchy shell and will help them develop a “foot.” (See Foot Check.)



BAKING, COOLING, AND FILLING

Deconstructing the last three steps before
you can enjoy macaron magic



BAKING: Preheat oven to 275°F (140°C). This low temperature helps keep the macaron shells from overbaking. Bake in batches until firm to the touch, 14 to 15 minutes, rotating pan every 5 minutes. The best way to know they are done is to try gently moving a top back and forth; if it moves, they need more time, but if it sticks, they are done.

COOLING: Let cool completely on pans. If you try to move the macaron shells while they are still warm, they will not release from the baking mat. If you accidentally underbake and they are sticking, place the pan in the freezer for 15 minutes before trying to move them.

FOOT CHECK: The “foot” of a macaron is the iconic indicator of a well-made and well-baked macaron. Resembling a frill or ruffle at the base of the shell, the foot should be pronounced but unbroken. If your foot is nonexistent, you might have overwhipped or underwhipped your meringue, and the oven temperature might not have been high enough to get the macarons to rise quickly. If the foot has spread out too much into a frothy-looking barrier, the oven temperature might have been too high, forcing the shells to spread instead of rise. It will take some understanding of your oven (use an oven thermometer) and meringue to get that ideal foot.



EXPERT TIP

Humidity can affect the fluffy rise of your meringue and the batter's ability to dry out before baking, so it's best to plan this baking project on a nice, dry day.

FILLING: Place Strawberry Buttercream in a piping bag fitted with a small round tip (Ateco #802). Pipe buttercream onto flat side of half of macaron shells. Don't fill completely, leaving a small border around the edges so the buttercream doesn't overflow when you top it with the second macaron shell. Place remaining macaron shells, flat side down, on top of buttercream. To keep from crushing your macaron shells during assembly, hold them in your hands by their edges and gently press them together.