

CHOCOLATE CAKE ACCENT: SWISS MINI MERINGUES



INGREDIENTS

266g (2¼ cups) confectioners' sugar

120g (4 each) large egg whites

EQUIPMENT

Whisk

Spatula

Stand mixer or hand mixer with whisk attachment

Candy thermometer

Piping bag

Plain #804 tip (⅜-inch/1 cm diameter)

Sheet tray

Parchment paper

Optional: Two 4-inch diameter by 2-inch tall ring molds (if making baked meringue base for pavlovas)

STORAGE

Store in a closed, airtight container at room temperature, away from humidity, for up to 1 week.

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 200°F (95°C) for conventional or 175°F (80°C) for convection.

Fill a medium pot with about 3 inches (about 7.5 cm) of water and bring to a simmer. In a medium heat-proof bowl (or the metal bowl of a stand mixer), stir together the confectioners' sugar and egg whites. Place the bowl on top of the pot of simmering water. The bowl should sit on the rim of the pot, well above the water.

Whisk the egg white mixture constantly as it warms. When it reaches 113°F (45°C) and feels hot to the touch and the sugar is fully dissolved, remove the bowl from the pot.

Using a stand mixer or hand mixer fitted with a whisk, whip the egg whites on high speed. As they whip, the egg whites will double in volume, thicken, and cool. When finished, the meringue will be very fluffy, with a consistency similar to shaving foam, and hold a medium-soft peak. This should take about 5 minutes, depending on your mixer.

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Tip: Don't worry about over-whipping the meringue. It won't affect the final outcome of the product, so better to over-whip than under-whip.

Tip: When making meringue, it is very important to use clean tools. If a drop of oil (or other fat) or egg yolk gets into the egg whites, the meringue will not whip properly.

OPTIONAL: If you want to add flavorings to this meringue, add them after the meringue is whipped to the proper consistency so that the flavorings don't impede the whipping process. With a rubber spatula, gently fold in any desired flavorings into the meringue (or you can leave the meringue plain-flavored as well). Feel free to separate the meringue into batches and use different flavors, like cocoa powder, ground cinnamon, grated lemon zest, or peppermint extract. Just make sure you keep all tools clean for each to avoid mixing them.

Tip: The more you work the meringue, the looser its structure becomes. When it bakes, a loose meringue will become flat and dense. It is very important to be as gentle as possible at this stage.

Tip: When choosing flavorings, pick ones that are very concentrated. Ground spices, alcohol-based extracts, and citrus zests are all good options. You can also add a drop of natural food coloring to your Swiss meringue to create colored Mini Me's.

To make Mini Me's:

Yield: about 200

Place a #804 plain tip in a plastic piping bag and use scissors to cut the bag to fit the tip. Fold over the top of the piping bag so it forms a lip all the way around. Form your non-dominant hand into a "C" shape and rest the bag in your hand, letting the lip of the bag

fall over your fingers. Using a spatula, place 2 large scoops of meringue in the bag so that it is one-third full. Push the meringue down toward the tip of the bag.

Tip: It is important to work with the meringue while it is slightly warm to the touch or else it will be too thick to pipe evenly.

Line a sheet pan with parchment paper. At each corner, pipe a small dot of meringue under the parchment and push the parchment flat. This will help keep it "glued" to the sheet pan.

Holding the piping bag at a 90-degree angle, or perpendicular, about ½ inch (1.25cm) above the sheet pan, pipe a dot of meringue with steady, even pressure until it reaches the size of a dime. Pull the piping bag straight up to create a fine point. (You should have a meringue teardrop shaped like a Hershey's Kiss.) Repeat piping drops about ½ inch (1.25cm) apart until all the meringue is used, refilling the piping bag as necessary. (You might need to use a few sheet pans, depending on the size of the Mini Me's.)

Bake the meringues for 20 minutes. Rotate the pan 180 degrees and bake for 20 minutes more. Continue to rotate every 20 minutes until the meringues are completely dry, about 1 hour 20 minutes total. The Mini Me's should be crispy all the way through. Transfer the Mini Me's, still on the parchment paper, to a wire rack to cool completely. When cool, remove gently from the parchment with your fingers.

MORE ON MERINGUES

The style of meringue Chef Dominique makes for the meringue drops that decorate his chocolate cake is the Swiss meringue. To make it, you gently cook the egg whites and sugar in a bowl set over a pan of boiling water (what Chef refers to as a “double boiler”) so that the meringue will become stable when whipped and can be easily piped for the baked meringue drops. This style of meringue is dense and smooth, so it’s usually used as a base to be mixed with other frostings, such as buttercream. It can also be piped and baked to make crunchy mini meringues (what Chef Dominique calls Mini Me’s), or molded in a ring mold and baked to create a fluffy meringue base for a pavlova. In America, it’s commonly used on top of a Lemon Meringue Pie or to cover a Baked Alaska, a classic dessert consisting of a round of cake, topped with ice cream, then encased in meringue to insulate it from the heat of the broiler or torch, which browns and caramelizes the meringue like a toasted marshmallow. Both desserts traditionally use French meringue; though in the past couple of decades, pastry chefs have begun using Swiss meringue in its stead.

For a variation on the cake, you can also pipe discs of meringue as a layer for the chocolate cake (in lieu of making mini me’s to decorate it).

TO MAKE A BAKED 4” MERINGUE BASE:

Yield: two 4-inch baked meringues

Once you’ve finished making your meringue (before it’s baked), place your two ring molds onto a silicone mat on a baking sheet (if you don’t have a silicone mat, you can also just line your baking sheet with parchment). Using a spatula, transfer half of the meringue into the first ring mold, smoothing out the sur-

face so that the meringue fully fills the mold. Carefully remove the ring. Repeat with the second ring.

Tip: If you don’t have a ring mold, you can use a spatula to form two mounds that are roughly 4-inch by 2-inch each. The meringue will spread slightly when baked.

Bake for 10 minutes at 375°F (190°C). Then turn down the oven to 325°F (163°C) and bake for 20 minutes more, until the outside of the meringue forms a thin and crunchy shell (about ⅛” thick) and is golden blonde in color, and the inside is tender and still a bit moist. Let the meringue cool to room temp (be careful not to touch it too much as it might deflate). Top with Chantilly and fresh fruits and enjoy.

There are two other styles of meringue you’ll encounter: **French and Italian.**

French meringue is made by mixing sugar with raw egg whites and is the least stable type of meringue. As such, it will usually need to be baked, so it’s best used when folded into other batters to give them lift and lightness or baked for crunchy meringue cookies. This type of meringue is the one you will learn to make for the biscuit element in the chocolate cake.

TO MAKE FRENCH MERINGUE:

Yield: about 900g

In a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, whip 300g (10 each) large egg whites on medium speed until soft peaks form. Gradually pour in 300g (1½ cups) granulated sugar a little bit at a time while continuing to mix until the mixture is smooth and shiny and has formed stiff peaks.

MORE ON MERINGUES

Stop mixing. Gently fold in 300g (2½ cups) confectioners' sugar by hand with a spatula until incorporated, being careful not to overmix and deflate the meringue. Now you can use the meringue to pipe and bake as needed for your desired recipe.

Italian meringue is the most stable of the three because it requires hot sugar syrup to be drizzled into whipped egg whites so you get beautiful, fluffy peaks. It'll be satiny in texture and will give you tall, proud peaks when you frost your cakes or pipe onto a cake or tart. To make Italian meringue, follow the recipe below:

TO MAKE ITALIAN MERINGUE:

Yield: about 500g, enough to top one 8-inch tart, cake, or pavlova

Make a sugar syrup by combining 286g (1½ cups) granulated sugar and 72g (⅓ cup) water in a small saucepan over medium heat while stirring to dissolve the sugar.

While the syrup is heating up, start whipping 144g (5 each) large egg whites in a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment on medium speed until they're foamy and cloudy. As soon as your sugar syrup reaches 250°F (121°C), remove from heat and stream it slowly into the whipping egg whites, continuing to whip on high until you get soft peaks. When you lift the whisk up, the meringue should still be warm and hold its shape. If it's cold, you've gone too far!

Decorate or pipe your tart/cake immediately. You can also gently brown the surface of the meringue with a small hand-held butane torch to give it a caramelized finish (be sure to ignite the torch away from the meringue first, so the meringue doesn't end up tasting like butane). Use the meringue right away. Don't store it in the fridge, because the sugar will start to separate and seep and that fluffy texture will start to deflate.