



Chocolate-Espresso Dacquoise

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 14: A Fancy Finale

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

We made this elaborate and impressive-looking dessert more approachable by reworking the meringue and buttercream, making them simpler and more foolproof. We swapped the traditional individually piped layers of meringue for a single sheet that was trimmed into layers after baking, and we shortened the usual 4-plus hours of oven time by increasing the oven temperature. While many recipes call for a Swiss or French buttercream made with a hot sugar syrup, we opted for a German buttercream. With equal parts pastry cream and butter, this option required no hot syrup and it enabled us to use up the egg yolks left over from the meringue.

Serves 10 to 12

The components in this recipe can easily be prepared in advance. Use a rimless baking sheet or an overturned rimmed baking sheet to bake the meringue. Instant coffee may be substituted for the espresso powder. To skin the hazelnuts, simply place the warm toasted nuts in a clean dish towel and rub gently. We recommend Ghirardelli Bittersweet Chocolate Baking Bar with 60% cacao for this recipe.

INGREDIENTS

MERINGUE

- 3/4** cup blanched sliced almonds, toasted
- 1/2** cup hazelnuts, toasted and skinned
- 1** tablespoon cornstarch
- 1/8** teaspoon salt
- 1** cup (7 ounces) sugar
- 4** large egg whites, room temperature
- 1/4** teaspoon cream of tartar

BUTTERCREAM

- 3/4** cup whole milk
- 4** large egg yolks
- 1/3** cup (2 1/3 ounces) sugar
- 1 1/2** teaspoons cornstarch
- 1/4** teaspoon salt
- 2** tablespoons amaretto or water
- 1 1/2** tablespoons instant espresso powder
- 16** tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

GANACHE

- 6** ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped fine
- 3/4** cup heavy cream
- 2** teaspoons corn syrup

12 whole hazelnuts, toasted and skinned

1 cup blanched sliced almonds, toasted

INSTRUCTIONS

1. FOR THE MERINGUE: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 250 degrees. Using ruler and pencil, draw 13 by 10 1/2-inch rectangle on piece of parchment paper. Grease baking sheet and place parchment on it, ink side down.

2. Process almonds, hazelnuts, cornstarch, and salt in food processor until nuts are finely ground, 15 to 20 seconds. Add 1/2 cup sugar and pulse to combine, 1 to 2 pulses.

3. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip egg whites and cream of tartar on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium-high and whip whites to soft, billowy mounds, about 1 minute. With mixer running at medium-high speed, slowly add remaining 1/2 cup sugar and continue to whip until glossy, stiff peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes. Fold nut mixture into egg whites in 2 batches. With offset spatula, spread meringue evenly into 13 by 10 1/2-inch rectangle on parchment, using lines on parchment as guide. Using spray bottle, evenly mist surface of meringue with water until glistening. Bake for 1 1/2 hours. Turn off oven and allow meringue to cool in oven for 1 1/2 hours. (Do not open oven during baking and cooling.) Remove from oven and let cool to room temperature, about 10 minutes. (Cooled meringue can be kept at room temperature, tightly wrapped in plastic wrap, for up to 2 days.)

4. FOR THE BUTTERCREAM: Heat milk in small saucepan over medium heat until just simmering. Meanwhile, whisk yolks, sugar, cornstarch, and salt in bowl until smooth. Remove milk from heat and, whisking constantly, add half of milk to yolk mixture to temper. Whisking constantly, return tempered yolk mixture to remaining milk in saucepan. Return saucepan to medium heat and cook, whisking constantly, until mixture is bubbling and thickens to consistency of warm pudding, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer pastry cream to bowl. Cover and refrigerate until set, at least 2 hours or up to 24 hours. Before using, warm gently to room temperature in microwave at 50 percent power, stirring every 10 seconds.

5. Stir together amaretto and espresso powder; set aside. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter at medium speed until smooth and light, 3 to 4 minutes. Add pastry cream in 3 batches, beating for 30 seconds after each addition. Add amaretto mixture and continue to beat until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes longer, scraping down bowl thoroughly halfway through mixing.

6. FOR THE GANACHE: Place chocolate in heatproof bowl. Bring cream and corn syrup to simmer in small saucepan over medium heat. Pour cream mixture over chocolate and let stand for 1 minute. Stir mixture until smooth. Set aside to cool until chocolate mounds slightly when dripped from spoon, about 5 minutes.

7. Carefully invert meringue and peel off parchment. Reinvert meringue and place on cutting board. Using serrated knife and gentle, repeated scoring motion, trim edges of meringue to form 12 by 10-inch rectangle. Discard trimmings. With long side of rectangle parallel to counter, use ruler to mark both long edges of meringue at 3-inch intervals. Using serrated knife, score surface of meringue by drawing knife toward you from mark on top edge to corresponding mark on bottom edge. Repeat scoring until meringue is fully cut through. Repeat until you have four 10 by 3-inch rectangles. (If any meringues break during cutting, use them as middle layers.)

8. Place 3 rectangles on wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet. Using offset spatula, spread 1/4 cup ganache evenly over surface of each meringue. Refrigerate until ganache is firm, about 15 minutes. Set aside remaining ganache.

9. Using offset spatula, spread top of remaining rectangle with 1/2 cup buttercream; place on wire rack with ganache-coated meringues. Invert 1 ganache-coated meringue, place on top of buttercream, and press gently to level. Repeat, spreading meringue with 1/2 cup buttercream and topping with inverted ganache-coated meringue. Spread top with buttercream. Invert final ganache-coated strip on top of cake. Use 1 hand to steady top of cake and spread half of remaining buttercream to lightly coat sides of cake, then use remaining buttercream to coat top of cake. Smooth until cake resembles box. Refrigerate until buttercream is firm, about 2 hours. (Once buttercream is firm, assembled cake may be wrapped tightly in plastic and refrigerated for up to 2 days.)

10. Warm remaining ganache in heatproof bowl set over barely simmering water, stirring occasionally, until mixture is very fluid but not hot. Keeping assembled cake on wire rack, pour ganache over top of cake. Using offset spatula, spread ganache in thin, even layer over top of cake, letting excess flow down sides. Spread ganache over sides in thin layer (top must be completely covered, but some small gaps on sides are OK).

11. Garnish top of cake with hazelnuts. Holding bottom of cake with 1 hand, gently press almonds onto sides with other hand. Chill on wire rack, uncovered, for at least 3 hours or up to 12 hours. Transfer to platter. Cut into slices with sharp knife that has been dipped in hot water and wiped dry before each slice. Serve.

TECHNIQUE**DIY DELUXE**

Our dacquoise is not just easier than a professional-bakery version—it's better.

MORE GANACHE: We spread ganache on the exterior as well as between the layers for rich chocolate in every bite.

EASIER BUTTERCREAM: Most buttercreams call for egg whites and a fussy hot sugar syrup. Ours skips the syrup and uses up yolks left over from making the meringue.

LIGHTER MERINGUE: This meringue is ready in half the time that most recipes take. It's also lighter and easier to slice and eat.

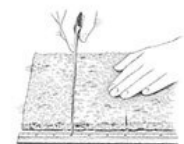
TECHNIQUE**DACQUOISE MADE DOABLE**

Here's how to assemble the three different components of dacquoise—cooled, baked meringue; buttercream; and ganache—into a dessert that looks as though it was made in a professional bakery.

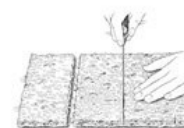
1. TRIM MERINGUE EDGES: Using serrated knife and gentle, repeated scoring motion, trim edges of cooled meringue to form 12 by 10-inch rectangle.



2. MEASURE AND MARK: With long side of rectangle parallel to counter, mark both long edges at 3-inch intervals.



3. CUT INTO 4 STRIPS: Repeatedly score surface by gently drawing knife from top mark to bottom mark until cut through. Repeat to make 4 strips.



4. TOP 3 STRIPS WITH GANACHE: Place 3 strips on wire rack and spread $\frac{1}{4}$ cup ganache evenly over each. Refrigerate for 15 minutes.



5. TOP 1 STRIP WITH BUTTERCREAM: Spread remaining strip with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup buttercream.



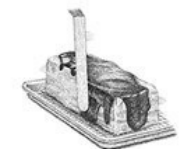
6. STACK STRIPS: Invert 1 ganache-coated strip on top of buttercream-coated strip. Spread with buttercream. Repeat. Invert final ganache-coated strip on top.



7. COAT WITH BUTTERCREAM: Coat sides of cake with half of remaining buttercream; coat top with remainder. Smooth and refrigerate until firm.



8. TOP WITH GANACHE: Pour warm ganache over cake and spread in thin, even layer, letting excess flow down sides. Spread thinly across sides.



9. GARNISH WITH NUTS: Use spatula to lift cake off rack. Arrange whole hazelnuts on top of cake and, holding cake with 1 hand, gently press almonds onto sides.



TECHNIQUE

ESSENTIAL TOOLS

With an offset spatula, spreading and smoothing ganache and buttercream is a snap. Our favorite for this recipe is the **Ateco 7.75-Inch Offset Spatula (\$8.60)**.



The only tool that can cut the meringue without shattering it is a long, sharp, serrated knife. Our favorite is the **Wüsthof Classic 10-Inch Bread Knife (\$89.95)**.



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