

Macaroons

By Allyssa Keogh

I consider myself an amateur baker. I have a side hustle of selling baked goods from my personal kitchen such as cheesecakes, cookies, scones and other delicious entities. I was never traditionally trained, but rather followed basic recipes gathered from cookbooks, blogs and cards passed down from family members while making little tweaks and changes to make the recipe my own. There was an instinct when baking, knowing that a touch of chocolate or a dash of cinnamon would enhance the bold flavors featured in the goods. There was an innate understanding why certain amount of cream cheese needed to be mixed with a certain amount of sugar or how sour cream combined with lemon juice could cleanse the mouth to prepare it for the rest of the dessert.

However, these things were now muscle memory. Easy to do without though or wonder how it's combined. My normal life gave me little time to practice new things or to experiment with new techniques. However, my life was no longer normal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic brought fears, anxieties and a limitation on my normal pantry supplies, but it also brought an opportunity to try something new. The rural town of Moab Utah depended on shipments for pantry items- flour and granule sugar were often limited. In this, I decided to test myself with macaroons- a delicate cookie that demanded time, attention and new ingredients. Instead of the average wheat flour, I had to work with almond flour. Instead of massive amounts of sugar to sweeten the cookie, alternative flavors were sought.

My first attempt was flawed as I was just getting to know the macaroon batter's temperament. I didn't not understand how mixed the egg whites needed to be before mixing in the flour, or how to stabilize it without adding too much air. I did not realize that the batter would react to the humidity within the house, or that it needed to settle before it could bake. This was a cookie that was truly testing my instincts, and I unfortunately did not pass. While the cookies tasted delicious, the texture was off and they could not be combined in the traditional sense with a filling in the center. They easily were crushed, but served their purpose as an afternoon treat.

Many attempts followed with different flavors. The final products have not always been successful, especially to sell, but they have been a fun treat for the family and a diversion from the world around us.

Macaroons, despite the work and attention needed, are a fun dessert to work on. It is unforgiving in the method of being made, but they do allow you to experiment with flavors. Macaroons allow you to choose sweet or savory, and even a combination of both. They are worth the try.

French Macaroons By Food Network Magazine

Ingredients:

- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 cup almond flour
- 3 large egg whites (room temperature)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cream of tartar

- Pinch of salt
- ¼ cup superfine sugar
- 3 to 4 Drops Gel food coloring (optional)
- ½ teaspoon vanilla, almond or mint extract

Instructions:

- Preheat the oven to 300 degrees F using the convection setting. Line 3 baking sheets with silicone mats. Measure the confectioners' sugar and almond flour by spooning them into measuring cups and leveling with a knife. Transfer to a bowl; whisk to combine.
- Sift the sugar-almond flour mixture, a little at a time, through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl, pressing with a rubber spatula to pass through as much as possible. It will take a while, and up to 2 tablespoons of coarse almond flour may be left; just toss it.
- Beat the egg whites, cream of tartar and salt with a mixer on medium speed until frothy. Increase the speed to medium high; gradually add the superfine sugar and beat until stiff and shiny, about 5 more minutes
- Transfer the beaten egg whites to the bowl with the almond flour mixture. Draw a rubber spatula halfway through the mixture and fold until incorporated, giving the bowl a quarter turn with each fold.
- Add the food coloring and extract (see below). Continue folding and turning, scraping down the bowl, until the batter is smooth and falls off the spatula in a thin flat ribbon, 2 to 3 minutes.
- Transfer the batter to a pastry bag fitted with a 1/4-inch round tip. Holding the bag vertically and close to the baking sheet, pipe 1 1/4-inch circles (24 per sheet). Firmly tap the baking sheets twice against the counter to release any air bubble
- Let the cookies sit at room temperature until the tops are no longer sticky to the touch, 15 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the humidity. Slip another baking sheet under the first batch (a double baking sheet protects the cookies from the heat).
- Bake the first batch until the cookies are shiny and rise 1/8 inch to form a "foot," about 20 minutes. Transfer to a rack to cool completely. Repeat, using a double sheet for each batch. Peel the cookies off the mats and sandwich with a thin layer of filling

Fillings can be icings, frostings, or jams.