

LES MACARONS/FRENCH MACARONS

A number of factors may affect the success of your macaron making - humidity and how your almond flour has been stored are just a couple - but most important are taking the meringue to the right stiffness and the technique with which you mix the macaron mixture. Too much and your macarons may run together; too little and they won't form the desired smooth tops. But no matter what, they should still taste good!

I strongly recommend weighing ingredients. In addition to a scale, other pieces of equipment that are generally used in macaron making are a stand mixer, a food processor, a flat sieve (the French call this a "tami") or sifter, half sheet pans and parchment paper or silicone mats. Essential tools are rubber spatulas, bowl scrapers, piping bags/round tips (usually 8-10 mm in diameter for the shells and 6-8 mm for fillings) and a couple of 4 to 5 quart stainless bowls.

Eggs separate best when cold and the whites will keep in the fridge in a covered container for a good week. "Aging" the whites this way helps break down the albumin resulting in a more liquid white. Tip: use the yolks to make ice cream or pastry cream.

Egg whites whip best at room temperature - some chefs/bakers take their egg whites out of the fridge the night before and leave them at room temperature. I typically take them out several hours ahead. When whipping egg whites, your mixing bowl and utensils should be squeaky clean - wiping the bowl out with a bit of vinegar or lemon juice will assure no greasy residue.

I have had good success using Silpat silicone mats for baking (rather than parchment paper). If coloring, concentrated gel coloring is recommended to create your desired end result. This recipe should make about 32 small *macaron* sandwiches.

- 110 gm egg whites / about 3.5 large, at room temperature
- 50 gm granulated sugar / 1/4 cup
- a pinch of cream of tartar (or 2 drops lemon juice and pinch salt)
- 120 gm almond flour / 1 1/4 cups
- 195 gm powdered sugar / 1 1/2 cups
- OPT: concentrated gel colors

the french tarte

the sweet taste of france

1. Heat the oven to 350°F (325°F convection) with two empty half-sheet pans in place on two separate racks. Line two additional half-sheet pans with parchment paper (“glue” down the corners with a bit of *macaron* mixture before piping) or silicone mats.
2. Place the almond flour and confectioner’s sugar in the bowl of a food processor and pulse for 20 seconds to combine. Sieve or sift the mixture onto a piece of parchment or into a clean bowl and set aside.
3. Place the egg whites in the clean bowl of a stand mixer and beat on low with the whisk attachment for a few minutes until the mixture looks white and foamy.
4. Now slowly shower in the granulated sugar while mixing on medium low (this should take a few minutes). Once the sugar is all added increase the speed to medium and whip over several minutes to firm peaks.
5. If adding color, do that now - concentrated gel base or powdered color, not water based colors. Start with a little - you can always add more.
6. Using a rubber spatula, fold the almond flour/confectioner’s sugar mixture into the meringue in three additions (*macaronage*), blending just until incorporated. Don’t over mix.
7. Now for the *macaroner*. Using a bowl scraper, work the mixture up and over itself as you rotate the bowl, scraping the sides regularly. Work until the mixture is shiny, glossy and flows like magma. The batter should hold a ribbon and not break.
8. Fill a piping bag with a 8-10 mm round tip and pipe about 1 1/4-inch rounds evenly on the prepared pans. The mixture should settle into a slightly larger round and hold it’s shape. Give the pan a couple of firm taps on the countertop to help remove any tiny air bubbles.
9. Let pans sit at room temperature for about 30 minutes to allow a skin to form on the surface. This helps in the “foot” formation during baking.
10. Bake 8 minutes, rotating trays half way through. Reduce oven to 275°F (250°F convection) and bake an additional 8 minutes. If the macarons move slightly from side to side when lightly touched with a fingertip, bake another minute more. They should be set and stable without movement when done.
11. Let cool, match up the shells by size and fill as desired.

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