

Cream Puffs with Strawberries

a recipe from www.maureenabood.com

These cream puffs are filled with vanilla pastry cream that is lightened with whipped cream. You can fill the puffs with just whipped cream or with ice cream. The choux paste dough is very soft and can be piped or spooned into the "choux," which means "little cabbages" in French. Choux paste is versatile in that when it is shaped into long logs, you have eclairs, and small balls, you have profiteroles. I love to include seasonal fruit like strawberries or raspberries, either on the side or tucked right into the puff. Make the pastry cream in advance (up to three days) so that it has time to chill. This recipe makes 12 3-inch puffs.

For the pastry cream:

2 cups whole milk
1 vanilla bean plus 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
5 egg yolks (save the whites for another use)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons flour
2 tablespoons corn starch
2 tablespoons unsalted butter

For the choux paste:

1 cup water
4 oz. unsalted butter (1 stick), cut into 1-inch pieces
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon sugar
1 cup flour
4 eggs, beaten
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup whipping cream

Strawberries and powdered sugar, for garnish

For the pastry cream:

In a medium heavy saucepan, scald the milk with scraped vanilla beans plus the pod over medium heat. Meanwhile, whisk the 5 egg yolks until they are lightly beaten. Add the sugar and salt and whisk until the mixture is smooth and light yellow in color. Add the flour and corn starch and whisk until thick and creamy.

Temper the eggs by pouring in about 1 cup of the hot milk. Whisk briskly to incorporate, and slowly add the remaining milk, whisking until fully combined. Pour the mixture through a sieve, discarding the vanilla bean and pod, back into the saucepan and return to medium heat. Whisk constantly until the mixture begins to thicken, 5-10 minutes. Take care not to burn the bottom of the pan while the pudding is cooking by whisking non-stop.

When the pastry cream is thick, remove from heat and add 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract and 2 tablespoons of butter. Pour into a small bowl and cover with plastic wrap directly against the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate until completely cool.

For the choux paste:

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a half-sheet pan with parchment paper.

In a small, heavy saucepan, melt the butter and salt with the water over low heat, then bring to a boil for a few seconds. Take care not to boil this mixture until the butter has melted, to ensure less moisture is lost.

Remove from heat and add the cup of flour all at once. Beat heartily with a wooden spoon, until no more flour is visible. Return to medium heat and beat until the mixture is warm and shiny, about a minute. Remove from the heat again (and for good). To add the eggs, do so a small amount at a time (about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup), beating thoroughly with your wooden spoon after each addition. The mixture will separate and become very wet and slippery with each addition of egg, but continue beating through this after each addition until the mixture incorporates and emulsifies into a smooth, moist dough. Reserve about 1 tablespoon of the egg at the end, which will be used as egg wash for the cream puffs before they are baked.

Spoon the choux paste in 12 evenly-sized rounds (about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches each) onto the prepared pan, about 2 inches apart. They are not going to be perfect in shape, which is to be expected. Using a small pastry brush, coat the top of each ball of dough with egg wash.

Bake in the middle of the oven at 400 degrees for 15 minutes. Do not open the oven during this time, to allow for the dough to puff up properly. Reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake for another 35 minutes, or until the puffs are golden and the crevices are no longer pale yellow. Remove from the oven and make a small cut in each puff with the point of a sharp knife to release steam from them. Turn the oven off and return the pan to the oven to allow the puffs to dry out for another 15 minutes.

Cool the puffs completely.

When ready to serve, reconstitute the chilled pastry cream by whisking it until smooth. Whip the heavy cream with a hand mixer until stiff peaks form. Fold the whipped cream into the pastry cream until fully combined.

Slice the strawberries, sprinkle with a tablespoon of powdered sugar, and allow to macerate for five minutes. Use a serrated knife to slice the top off of each puff. Remove any excess eggy dough from inside the puffs. Fill each puff with a large spoonful of pastry cream. Place the top on the puff, place the puff on a plate, and sift powdered sugar over the puff and the plate. Spoon the strawberries alongside the cream puff, and devour!