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How Do People Make French Macarons?

Baking has always been one of my favorite activities. I have made many desserts, but none as challenging as the French Macaron. Many people make the mistake of thinking that a macaroon is the same thing as a French macaron. I was also guilty of this. A macar*oon* is a dense, coconut cookie, while a French macar*on* is a light sandwich cookie with a filling. Despite their differences they are pronounced the same way.

The French Macaron is known as the world’s most difficult cookie. It is aptly named. A friend and I once attempted to make them and failed miserably. A macaron is the demanding, temperamental trophy-wife of the cookie world; everything must be done exactly right and it must be pampered, or it will have a tantrum. Macarons are very delicate and even the smallest mistake can ruin them. A year ago, when my friend and I tried to make macarons, we did not give them the care they need and as a result they became sad, flat, soggy things. Macarons are very difficult to make but would not accept defeat! I was determined to conquer the cookie!

To start my journey to learn how to make a successful French macaron, I did some major research. I found multiple recipes online, checked out books from the library, and found helpful videos. I also used my own experiences making the cookies to learn and improve. These were all incredibly helpful in teaching me everything I needed to know to get good at making macarons. Each one contributed a different piece of information that is crucial to the process. Before I started baking, I gathered all of my resources and did my research.

As eager as I was to get started, before I could make macarons, I had to find a recipe to follow. I found about seven different recipes online that I compared. All of the recipes were fairly alike and had the same basic ingredients: confectioners sugar, egg whites, white sugar, and almond flour. The steps were also comparable but some recipe’s instructions were more in-depth. To make the macarons I had to decide on one recipe that I would follow. The first batch I made was coffee flavored. For this I used a recipe specific to coffee macarons on momdish.com*.* This recipe was very similar to all the others, but it showed me when I needed to add the flavoring. The instructions however, were unfortunately vague. Because I had looked at so many recipes and knew they were all very similar, I was able to also use a plain macaron recipe from foodnetwork.com to make sure I was doing it correctly. Between the two of them I was able to figure out everything I needed to do and made the cookies! These websites were very helpful in teaching me how to make macarons; after all, I can’t make them without a recipe to follow. These showed me what tools and ingredients were needed and what steps must be followed to not screw up.

Although these recipes were very helpful, I don’t think I would have been successful without the help of honestcooking.com and Beth. I found an article on honestcooking.com and a video on YouTube, “Beth’s Foolproof French Macaron Recipe,” that gave tips on how to not mutilate macarons. The article is called “Top Ten Tips to Making Macarons.” The title tells it all. The article gives tips and tricks on how to make macarons. The first advice given is that practice makes perfect. Macarons are tricky and the best way to get good is by making them. I also learned that when mixing the wet and dry ingredients together, it is best to use a flexible spatula. This article also had important tips on food coloring! Macarons are famous for their bright colors. Thankfully my first batch didn’t require any coloration because a certain type of food coloring is needed. Using liquid food coloring can throw the whole thing off balance, ruining the batter and ending them in a fiery death. Okay, maybe subtract the pyrotechnics, but it will ruin the cookies. Gel food coloring is required. They also recommend putting the food coloring in when whipping the eggs to make sure the color is evenly spread. I did not know any of these things beforehand and none of them were in the recipes. Because of this article I was able to follow their tips and prevent macaron mayhem.

The YouTube video, “Beth’s Foolproof French Macaron Recipe,” was by far the most helpful. Remember when I said macaron are needy and want to be pampered? Well this video explains that the eggs need to be room temperature; no cooler, no warmer. They must be taken out of the fridge a few hours in advance or put in warm water for a few minutes. Beth, the YouTuber, also taught me how crucial the mixing of the ingredients is. The batter must be stirred *perfectly*. If it is stirred too many times, the cookie will fall and become flat and hard. If they are not stirred enough, they will be lumpy and cracked. One stir can be the difference between life and death… Or a pretty macaron. Beth showed how to know when the batter has been stirred enough. Once it is perfectly stirred, the batter must be put into a piping bag which is then used to pipe one and one-half inch circles of batter onto a pan that is covered in parchment paper. Using parchment paper is crucial. Using a greased pan will ruin the cookies. The fat in the grease will offset the balance; once again leading to a fit, resulting in a fiery death. Beth also recommended banging the pan up and down a few times to release any air bubbles. The next step she talked about is one of the most important. Once the cookies are on the cookie sheet, they must sit on the countertop for 25-30 minutes. Due to our eagerness, my friend and I skipped this step when we made the unsuccessful macarons. I now see its importance. This lets the macarons dry out a little bit so they rise when they cook instead of flattening. When it is finally time to bake them, being the picky, pampered cookies they are, the macarons want the oven all to themselves. Because they are so fragile and easy to mess up, it is best to bake them one tray at a time to ensure they are all cooked evenly.

Finally, after collecting all of this information, I felt I was ready to try making my first batch! Coffee flavored macarons have always been one of my favorites and are fairly straightforward, so this was the flavor of my first batch of homemade French macarons! I went through the recipes I had found and followed the one from momdish.com that was specific to coffee flavoring. Since the directions were not very detailed, I also used directions from a recipe on foodnetwork.com for plain macarons. I had everything I needed and I was ready! It was time to use all the information I gathered and put myself to the test! I must say, it went fairly smoothly. The only time I felt unsure was when I was whipping the eggs and I did not know what speed I should whip them at or when they were adequately whipped. Once I had mixed together all the ingredients, I piped the first tray. Because I had done my research, I noticed that the cookies did not look right. They were too stiff. I knew that I needed to mix the dough a few more times. I did this and the next tray of cookies turned out much better! I let the cookies sit for half an hour as instructed and while I waited, I cleaned a bit of the catastrophe that had become my kitchen. Once they were out of the oven, it was easy to tell the difference between the under-stirred cookies and the ones I had stirred a few more times. After the cookies had cooled, I added the fillings. I had no problems with this but I think it would be easier to put the filling into a piping bag and then squeeze it onto the cookies.

My first batch turned out pretty good if I do say so myself! The true sign of a good macaron is if it has the small ridges around the bottom. I had the ridges. I was very happy with how they turned out. Making the macarons showed me what things I still needed to work on and what things I needed to look into further. Before I made my next attempt, I read up on how to whip egg whites and found out how stiff the whipped egg whites should be. This made it much easier and I was more confident when I reattempted. Making the cookies also showed me how important mixing the ingredients together is and gave me practice to get better at identifying when I have mixed enough.

Knowing I was going to be making a lot of macarons, I was going to need a lot of recipes. I know how helpful cookbooks can be and found two books on macarons from the library. I had already finished my first batch when I got them, but I was excited for more! The books became available and I rushed down to the library. What a coincidence, both books are called *Macarons*!

One of the books, *Macarons; Authentic French Cookie Recipes for the MacarOn Café* by Cecile Cannone has recipes she acquired from growing up in Paris. The recipes in this book are the ones used at the MacarOn Café that she opened in New York. This book is broken down into two main parts; how to make shells and how to make fillings. This made it easy to mix and match, making raspberry shells with lemon filling, or raspberry filling with chocolate shells. This gave the opportunity for more options and creative recipes. It also had recipes for gingerbread and apple spice macarons; great for the upcoming holidays!

The other book, *Macaron; Chic & Delicious French Treats* by Annie Rigg had a huge variety of new, tasty flavors. Some of them were plain shells that were colored and had a flavored filling and others had flavoring in both the shell and the filling. Some of these recipes are more complex and require doing some preparation the day before. The books have very detailed directions and made it easy to find a wide variety of recipes for flavors I never knew I needed in my life.

I made another batch of macarons after I got the books. This time I wanted to make my second favorite flavor; lemon. This time I got to use my new cookbooks! To make the cookies, I used the lemon shell recipe from Rigg’s book and used Cannone’s lemon buttercream recipe for the filling. When I made this batch I also tried to video tape what I was doing so I could later make a video. I think this became too much of a distraction. The trophy-wife macaron got jealous of the attention I was giving my camera and the cookies did not turn out. The macarons tasted very good but they were under mixed. This lead to very flaky and cracked shells that lacked the telltale ridges at the bottom. Obviously, I still needed some practice. Although I felt fairly comfortable with the first batch of coffee macarons, I still messed up the second time. As much of my investigation told me, macarons take practice.

There is a lot that goes into making macarons. They need the right conditions and need to be executed carefully and with precision. The trophy wife must be satisfied. After my severe failure a year ago, I was not going to accept defeat. I wanted to master the macaron. In order to do this, to learn how to make them and then successfully do so, I had to do an in-depth investigation on the mystery of the macaron. I used online recipes, videos, websites, and cook books to conduct my study. Once I found enough information to feel confident in my abilities, I made my own. I learned that the best way to get good at making macarons is by making them and getting practice! I also learned that as difficult and temperamental as they can be, it is not impossible to make macarons. They take some research, some practice, and a lot of dedication, but it is possible, and man they are tasty!

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