

ETON MESS

I love everything about this dish - the name, the combination of ingredients, the endless number of ways to present it, and especially the many tales surrounding its origins. My favourite (and the most unlikely tale) involves an over-excited Golden Labrador sitting on a perfect strawberry pavlova at an Eton College open day picnic - resulting in the now famous "Eton Mess." Another suggests that it was traditionally served at the annual Eton College versus Winchester College cricket match, which dates back to 1796. All that we know for certain is that it does originate from Eton, which was attended by both Princes William and Harry. School records show that during the 1930's it was sold in the school "tuckshop" and was described as "a sweet made from strawberries or bananas with ice cream or cream."

This is my interpretation of Eton Mess. However you choose to combine and present summer fruits with cream and meringues, you will end up with something luscious and indulgent!



INGREDIENTS: Serves 4

For the meringue: 3 egg whites
(at room temperature)

3oz / 85g white caster sugar

3oz / 85g golden caster sugar

A few drops of pure vanilla extract

8oz / 225g mixed berries -
I use strawberries, blueberries
and raspberries, but you can also
include red or blackcurrants or
blackberries.

1/2 cup / 110ml of raspberry pu-
ree made by blending 4oz / 115g
raspberries with 2 tablespoons /
25ml icing sugar and a few drops
of lemon juice. After blending, rub
through a fine sieve to remove all
pips, then add 4 fresh mint leaves
and blend again.

1 cup / 225ml double cream

1/2 cup / 110ml mascarpone

2 tablespoons / 25ml caster sugar

A handful of fresh mint leaves -
very finely chopped

A few extra mint leaves for garnish

Icing sugar for dusting

METHOD:

1. Set the oven to 160°C (325°F)
2. Line two baking trays with non-stick baking parchment.
3. Make the meringues: In a dry clean bowl whisk the egg whites to 'stiff peak stage'; they should be glossy and stand in firm peaks.
4. Add the sugar slowly while whisking and continue to whisk for about 5 minutes until the mixture is very thick and stands up on its own. Finally add the vanilla extract.
5. Using a piping bag with a medium star nozzle, pipe the meringue into thin discs. You will need 4 each of the following sizes - 10cm, 8cm, 6cm, 4cm and 2cm
6. Bake for 30 - 40 minutes. When cooked they will be firm and 'crisp' and will easily lift off the baking parchment, but they should not colour at all.
7. Once cooked, turn off the oven and leave them in there to dry out further while the oven cools down.
8. The meringues can be made up to a week in advance. Store in an airtight container.

TO ASSEMBLE:

1. Wash, dry and prepare all the berry fruits.
2. Whip the cream until thick and then stir in the mascarpone, the sugar and chopped mint and put it into a piping bag.
3. Beginning with the largest disc, pipe a little cream onto it and then arrange some raspberries neatly on top of the cream. Place the 8cm disc on top, pipe cream onto it and arrange some blueberries carefully. Repeat the process 3 more times with the three remaining discs, topping them with strawberry pieces, blueberries and top with a single raspberry (as per photograph)
4. Repeat the entire process three more times.
5. Do not assemble the dish more than an hour before you are going to serve it as the meringues lose their crispness.
6. Just before serving drizzle with the raspberry puree, garnish with mint leaves and dust with icing sugar.
7. It is best assembled on the plate on which it will be served - it is a precarious process trying to move it once assembled!

For a simpler presentation make small meringues which can be crushed and layered in a sundae glass with the cream, berries and raspberry puree. Finish with a sprig of mint and dusting of icing sugar.

VARIATION:

If you can't get fresh berries, try making a 'Hawaiian Mess' using pineapple, passion fruit, mango, banana and kiwi fruit. Use mango puree instead of raspberry and sprinkle with toasted coconut flakes - DELICIOUS!