

Meringues with Mastic

Ashuplados kon almastica

These elegant, ivory-coloured clouds of meringues are crunchy to bite into but yet soft and chewy inside because of their soft mastic and vanilla flavoured centres.

Meringues are easy to prepare and utterly divine. They are extremely versatile and can be transformed into an impressive prepare-ahead dessert, topped with generous dollops of sweetened lightly whipped cream with an exotic tropical twist of sliced mangoes, pineapple and a drizzle of warm passion fruit syrup. They can also be made individually with swirls of melted chocolate or fresh berry purée and served with ice cream and seasonal berries.

Meringues are the ideal flourless sweet offerings for Passover.

For the meringues:

6 egg whites
300g (10½oz) caster (superfine) sugar
2 crystals mastic, crushed with 1 tsp sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract

For the topping:

½ cup chopped pistachios
¾ cup flaked almonds or ½ cup cocoa powder

Preheat the oven to 120°C (250°F). Line 2 baking trays with baking paper, sticking it firmly on the tray with a little meringue.

Put the egg whites in a clean bowl of a free-standing electric mixer fitted with a whisk attachment and beat until the whites double in volume and hold a slightly bent peak when you lift the whisk. Add half the sugar, a tablespoon at a time, incorporating each tablespoon completely before adding the next one. Tip in the remaining sugar and whisk until the whites are stiff and glossy. Fold in the ground mastic and vanilla extract with a metal spoon. Reduce the oven temperature to 110°C (225°F).

With two large metal spoons, take a big spoonful of the meringue mixture, the size of a small orange and scrape it off placing it onto the baking trays. Repeat spacing the meringues well apart. I like large individual spiky ones. Top with chopped pistachios, flaked almonds or sprinkle with cocoa powder when making for afternoon tea or leave plain if using as a dessert. Bake for about 70 minutes or until they are crisp, depending on the size of the meringues. Check that the underside is firm to the touch and dry. Turn off the oven and allow the meringues to cool completely in the oven for 30 minutes or overnight as I do.

Stella's Hints:

The meringues can be stored in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.

Twist on Tradition: Tropical meringue dessert:

- Whip 2 cups heavy cream until thick but not stiff, with 1 tsp vanilla essence.
- Peel and slice 1 large, ripe, fresh mango and cut into slices.

For the passion fruit syrup: 1 cup caster sugar; ½ cup water; 1 cup passion fruit pulp (about 12 scooped out passion fruit).

Make the syrup: Place the sugar, water and passion fruit pulp in a small pan over a medium-high heat and stir until the sugar has dissolved. Bring to a boil. Then reduce the heat and simmer for 8-10 minutes or until syrupy.

Assemble the dessert 10 minutes before serving so that the meringues remain crunchy. Have the cream, fruit and syrup ready.

Stack the meringues high on a cake-stand. Top with spoonfuls of whipped cream, scatter the mango slices and drizzle with the warm passion fruit syrup. Serve.