



Culinary Institute
of America

A Taste of France

Desserts



Learning Objectives

- Describe the flavor profiles of classic French desserts.
- List the key ingredients in and classic flavors used in French desserts.
- Describe common French fillings and their uses.
- List the textures found in common French desserts.
- Explain common techniques used when making popular French desserts.
- Identify common French desserts and their variations.
- Prepare a variety of French desserts using standardized recipes.

Flavor Profiles

- Complex yet balanced
- Flavors and textures are often layered

Rich & Decadent: desserts are often heavy on cream, butter, chocolate

Sweet & Tart: balance of sweetness with citrus/ other acidic fruits

Nutty & Floral: Nuts paired with floral or herbal notes are common in fillings/ garnishes



Classic Flavorings

Chocolate: in cakes, tarts, mousses, ganaches

Vanilla: used in custards, cakes, as a base flavor

Citrus: lemon, orange, lime for acidity or sweetness

Berries: commonly strawberries, raspberries, blackberries

Coffee: to flavor mousses/creams, enhances chocolate flavors

Almond: flour or paste for sweetness in cookies/pastries



Fillings

Pastry cream: a custard used in éclairs, tarts, mille-feuilles

Ganache: mixture of chocolate + cream, used in cakes, truffles, macarons

Chantilly cream: airy filling used in choux pastry or layered cakes

Frangipane: sweet almond cream used in tarts like *galette des rois*

Fruit compote/jam: in tarts, cakes, pastries for flavor or freshness

Mousse: Light, airy cream made from whipped cream, egg yolks, chocolate/fruit puree



Textures



Flaky: croissants, *palmiers*, puff pastry-based desserts like *mille-feuille*

Smooth/Creamy: custards, mousse, ganache, buttercream

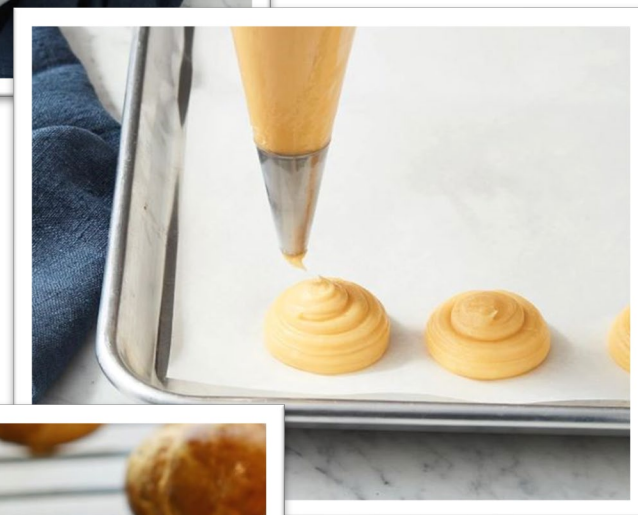
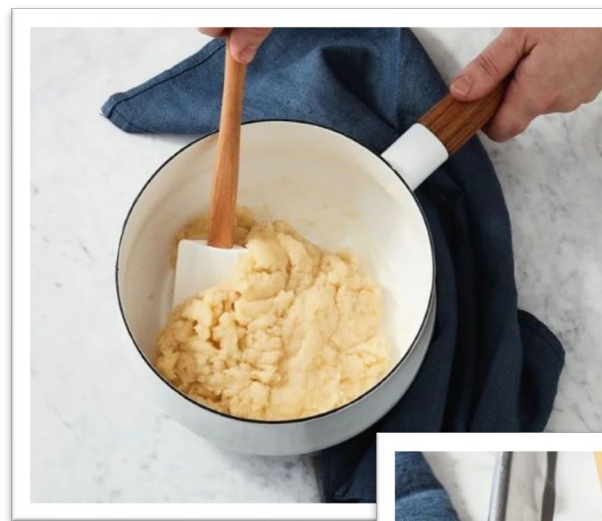
Crispy: tarts, *pâte à choux*, caramelized sugar

Soft/Spongy: madeleines, sponge cakes, the interior of an éclair

Chewy: macarons

Pâte à choux

- Classic French pastry dough
- “Pre-cooked” method: gelatinizes the starches before baking for moisture retention
- Steam is the only leavening
- **2:1:1:2 ratio** – butter: water: flour: eggs
- Mostly sweet varieties, can also be savory
- Used for cream puffs, croquembouche, profiteroles, éclairs, Paris Brest



Éclairs

- Choux pastry filled with pastry cream, dipped in fondant icing
- Formerly known as "*petite duchesse*"
- Said to have been created by Chef Antonin Carême
- Can also be filled with whipped or *chiboust* cream
- Often found in trendy flavors like green tea, mocha



Custards



- Anything thickened by eggs
- Made primarily of eggs, cream, sugar
- More egg yolks = more richness
- Classified as **baked**, **stirred**, or **boiled**

Uses: fillings, layering, in pudding, pies, tartes

Method

- Heat milk & $\frac{1}{2}$ sugar in a saucepan
- Combine egg yolks & $\frac{1}{2}$ sugar in a bowl
- Temper heated milk into egg yolks

Next steps vary by **classification**

Crème Brûlée

- A **baked** custard
- Means “burnt cream”
- Usually served in individual ramekins
- Topped with caramelized sugar & sometimes fruit

Method

- Flavored with vanilla on the stove
- Custard base is baked in water bath (*bain marie*) for evenness & temperature control
- Must be baked at low heat



Crème Anglaise



- A **stirred** custard
- Has a thin, pourable consistency
- Used to top desserts & ice cream
- Can be used as ice cream base
- Sometimes flavored with citrus zest

Method

- Flavors added to heated milk
- Custard base is returned to stove & stirred at low heat until ***nappe*** stage (165-185°F)

Pastry Cream

- A **boiled** custard
- Thickened with eggs + starch, usually cornstarch for stability & consistency
- Flavored with vanilla, chocolate, coconut, fruit puree
- Used as a filling for éclairs, tarts, Paris-Brest

Method:

- Flavorings are added into milk or at the end
- Custard base is returned to heat and boiled for 3 minutes, until starch flavor is removed



Meringues

- Made by whipping egg whites + sugar
- Acid, (vinegar, cream of tartar) often added for stability
- Used as a topping, filling
- Used as a base for: chiffon sponge cake, angel food cake, buttercreams, macarons
- Provides mechanical leavening in baked goods by trapping air
- Soft, medium, or stiff peaks affect texture



Macarons

- A meringue-based sandwich cookie
- Made with almond flour, egg whites, confectioners' sugar, food coloring, flavoring
- Common flavors: vanilla, chocolate, pistachio, lemon, raspberry
- Common fillings: buttercream, ganache, fruit jam
- Smooth tops, ruffled edges (called the *crown*, *foot*, or *pied*), flat bottoms, smooth filling
- Texture: slightly crispy, airy, light, slightly cakey, a bit chewy



Lamination



- Method of incorporating layers of butter into dough to create flaky pastries
- Used for croissants, puff pastries (*pâte feuilletée*)

Method

- Cold butter must be spread out evenly over middle of dough
- Dough is folded over butter and chilled
- Chilled dough is rolled out, folded, and chilled again
- This is repeated to create desired number of layers

Mille-Feuille

- Thin puff pastry layers alternating with a filling, topped with icing
- Made using the lamination method for flaky pastry layers
- Flavors: buttery pastry, vanilla cream, chocolate icing
- Common fillings: pastry cream, whipped cream, fruit filling
- Texture: light, airy, crunchy, creamy



Croissants

- A yeast-leavened (*viennoiserie*) pastry
- *Croissant* = crescent
- Made using the lamination method for flaky layers
- Derived from the crescent-shaped Austrian dessert, *kipferl*

Fillings: savory or sweet

- Savory: ham, cheese
- Sweet: chocolate (*pain au chocolat*), almond paste, fruit



Tartes



- Flaky crust filled with custards, fruits, or ganache
- Made with a flaky tarte crust (*pâte brisée*) or a sweet short crust (*pâte sucrée*)
- Fruits can be cooked or fresh, often with a layer of pastry cream underneath
- Can be made savory or sweet

Tarte Tatin

- Most famous tart in France
- Caramelized apples baked beneath a pastry crust then flipped over after baking
- Flavors: caramel, sweet, fruity, buttery
- Texture: soft, crispy, flaky, sticky



Cakes

- Known for refined techniques, rich flavors, beautiful presentation
- Common cake bases:
 - Light, airy: sponge, chiffon, genoise
 - Dense, moist: butter, chocolate
- Common fillings: butter cream, pastry cream, whipped cream, fruit fillings, ganache, lemon curd
- Common toppings: frosting, fondant, chocolate shavings, fruit, nuts, edible flowers



Madeleines

- Small, shell-shaped sponge cakes
- Texture: light and delicate inside, slightly crisp edge
- Flavors: lemon, vanilla, almond
- Commonly paired with coffee, tea



Opera Cake

- Layers are said to resemble the stages of an opera
- Symbolizes elegance, refinement
- Layered almond sponge cake
- Sponge layers soaked in coffee syrup
- Fillings: coffee flavored buttercream, ganache
- Topping: chocolate glaze





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Any Questions?