

Meringue Mushrooms

Makes enough mushrooms for 1 bûche de Noël

1 cup granulated sugar
4 large egg whites (about 1 cup)
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 tablespoon cocoa powder, plus more for dusting
3 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate

1. Heat the oven to 225°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, and set aside.
2. In a small saucepan, heat the sugar and ½ cup water over low heat until the sugar dissolves. Bring to a boil; cook until the liquid reaches 250-255°F (hard ball stage) on a candy thermometer.
3. Meanwhile, in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whip the egg whites on low speed until soft peaks form. Increase the mixer speed to high, and add the hot sugar syrup in a steady stream, beating constantly. Continue beating until cool and stiff, about 5 minutes. Beat in the vanilla, then fold in the cocoa powder.
4. Spoon the meringue into a large pastry bag fitted with a large plain tip. Pipe the meringue onto the prepared baking sheet to form 2-inch domes. Pipe a separate step shape for each dome.
5. Sprinkle cocoa powder lightly over the just-formed meringues. Bake the meringues until dry, about 2 hours. Store in an airtight container until ready to use.
6. To assemble the mushrooms, melt the chocolate in a double boiler or in a heat-proof bowl set over a pan of simmering water. Trim off the points from the tops of the stems. Using a small brush, paint the melted chocolate onto the underside of each cap, and place the trimmed end of the stem into the center of the painted cap. Place the mushroom, stem side up, in an empty egg carton to harden. Repeat with the remaining mushrooms.
7. See step #8 of the cake recipe for how the mushrooms should be applied to the cake.

Recipe courtesy of Restaurant Associates Chef William Bednar

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