

NightBaking

<http://nightbaking.blogspot.com/2012/05/vanilla-macarons-with-seriously-good.html>

Swiss Meringue Buttercream (adapted from Bravetart)

Makes about 6 cups

10 ounces egg whites (usually 8-10 eggs; it's okay if it's a little more)

10 ounces sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

scrapings of a vanilla bean

4 sticks (1 pound) unsalted butter at room temperature, cut into 1" chunks

vanilla extract

Combine the egg whites, sugar, salt, and vanilla bean in a clean bowl. Set the bowl over a pan of water and turn the heat on medium low. If your stove is particularly fast, go slow! It's not worth ending up with scrambled eggs; better to use a lower temperature and take an extra minute. The water does not even need to simmer; it just needs to be hot enough to create steam to heat the whites. Whisk frequently, though you don't have to whisk constantly. I would err on the side of hovering over this; at least, don't walk too far from the stove. Cook until everything is dissolved and the temperature reads 145-150F. If the eggs start out at room temperature, this will take just a few minutes; it will take a little longer with cold egg whites.

When the mixture has reached temp, remove from the heat and whip on medium high until it has doubled in volume and turned snowy white. (I let my Kitchen Aid with the whisk attachment do the work. I think this also helps it cool faster. If you are using a glass or ceramic bowl, transfer the meringue to a new bowl before proceeding.) Continue whipping until the meringue is cool. You'll know it's cool when the bowl is absolutely cool to the touch with no warmth at all.

Switch to the paddle attachment. Turn the mixer down to medium-low and begin adding in the butter, one chunk at a time. After all the butter is in, scrape down the bowl to fully incorporate any butter or meringue stuck to the sides. Finally, add vanilla extract, 1/4 teaspoon at a time, to taste. This is also the time to flavor the frosting with peanut butter or chocolate or whatever else you might like.

Use, or refrigerate for up to a week, or freeze for a few months.

Note: buttercream sometimes "breaks," meaning it looks curdled. This can happen, for example, if you start adding butter before your meringue mixture is cool enough. If it does happen, just keep beating. You'll be doubtful, but it will eventually come together!