

4) *Frosting and serving*

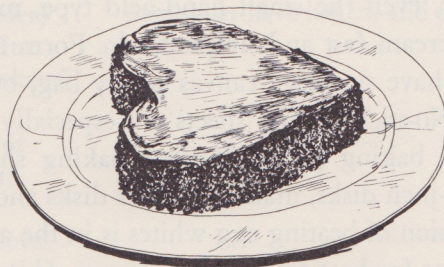
WHIPPED CREAM. To serve the cake as a dessert or with tea, spread lightly whipped cream, sweetened and flavored with vanilla or orange liqueur, around and over the cake (*crème Chantilly*, page 450, or the *Chantilly meringuée*, page 430). Decorate with shaved or grated chocolate.

MERINGUE ICING. Or use the plain Italian meringue (hot sugar syrup whipped into stiffly beaten egg whites, page 426), or the meringue butter cream on page 489.

CHOCOLATE ICING. Or while the cake is still warm, spread on the same chocolate and butter mixture that you used for the filling, or use one of the chocolate butter creams listed in Volume I, pages 680-4.

* *LE SUCCÈS—LE PROGRÈS, LA DACQUOISE*

[Meringue-nut Layer Cake with Butter-cream Frosting and Filling]



This particularly delicious type of French cake rarely appears among American recipes, yet it is far easier to make than a layer cake, and infinitely more elegant. Light yet rich, every mouthful is a poem. This is the kind of pastry you will see in the very best French pastry shops, and it is one that you can duplicate or even improve upon because you need not skimp on ingredients or quality.

To describe the cake, it is layers of baked meringue mounted one upon the other, like a regular layer cake, with filling in between. The meringue layers, *fonds à Succès*, are composed of egg whites and sugar beaten in a machine like any meringue, but when it forms stiff peaks ground almonds are folded in. The meringue is then spread out in disk shapes, heart shapes like our illustrations, or whatever other shapes you wish, and baked, like all meringues, in a very slow oven. The taste and texture of this mixture is, of course, far more interesting than plain meringue and just as easy to make.

HISTORICAL AND PHILOLOGICAL NOTES

While the cooked disks of meringue are called *fonds*, meaning foundations or layers, and *fonds à Succès* when the cake is titled *Le Succès*, you will

see the terms *fonds à Progrès*, *fonds parisiens*, *Dacquoise*, *broyage suisse*, and *gâteau japonais* in French recipe books and elsewhere. Some authorities consider the *Succès* as containing almonds, and the *Progrès* almonds and filberts (*noisettes*, hazelnuts), while the *Dacquoise* is either formula plus starch and butter; other recipes make no distinctions. *Broyage* obviously comes from *broyer*, to grind, and refers to the ground nuts in the meringue; *gâteau japonais* appears to be British for meringue-nut layer cake.

There are various opinions, also, on what should fill and what should frost a *Succès* versus a *Progrès* or a *Dacquoise*. Since no one agrees on anything, you are quite safe in doing whatever you wish. In addition to the frosting and filling in the following recipe, other suggestions are at the end of it, on page 504.

MANUFACTURING NOTE

An electric mixer, even the small hand-held type, makes both the meringue and the butter cream fast and simple to do. Form the meringue disks with a spatula if you have no large canvas pastry bag, but the bag usually makes neater shapes. No-stick baking sheets are especially recommended for meringues, or no-stick baking paper. If your baking sheets are not large enough to hold three 8-inch disks, make 4 smaller disks and a 4- rather than a 3-layer cake. (A discussion of beating egg whites is in the appendix, page 539, and illustrated directions for beating and folding egg whites are in Volume I, pages 159-61.) You will need toasted almonds and almond *pralin* (caramelized almonds), and do read the recipe through before you plan to make the cake so there will be no surprise ingredients or timings.

A NOTE ON NUTS—FILBERTS

You may use either ground blanched almonds or half and half ground almonds and ground filberts (hazelnuts, *noisettes*) in the following recipe. Filberts are not as easily available here as in France, and the ready-shelled packaged nuts turn rancid rapidly; shelled or ground filberts should be stored in the freezer, as should ground almonds.

To prepare shelled filberts for cooking, first eat a few to be sure they are fresh and fine, then spread the nuts on a baking sheet and dry them out in a 350-degree oven for about 15 minutes, until skins begin to flake off and nut flesh has browned very lightly. Remove from oven, rub nuts a small handful at a time between paper towels to remove as much skin as will easily come off. Grind the nuts by ½-cup batches in an electric blender.

If you use half ground filberts and half ground blanched almonds rather than almonds alone for the meringues in the following recipe, call your cake *Le Progrès* rather than *Le Succès*.

For an 8-inch cake, serving 8 to 10

1) *Preliminaries*

- 1 to 2 Tb soft butter
- 2 large baking sheets 14 by 16 inches (no-stick if possible)
- ¼ cup flour
- A marker, such as an 8-inch round pot lid, a cake pan, a heart, or whatever shape you wish your cake to be
- A rubber spatula
- 6 ounces (1½ cups loosely packed) ground blanched almonds (may be ground in an electric blender)
- 1 cup sugar (extra-fine granulated or "instant" recommended)
- A double thickness of waxed paper about 10 by 12 inches
- 1 level Tb plus 1½ level tsp unsifted cornstarch
- A fine-meshed sieve
- A canvas pastry bag 12 to 14 inches long with round metal tube opening ⅜ inch in diameter

Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Rub soft butter over top of baking sheets, covering surface completely. Roll flour all over buttered surface and knock off excess. Make three 8-inch rings or other shapes on baking sheets by drawing around marker with point of rubber spatula. Measure the almonds and sugar onto waxed paper, and work with fingers to remove any lumps. Sieve over this the cornstarch, and mix in with rubber spatula; set aside. Assemble the pastry bag. (Note that you will need *pralin*—caramelized almonds, page 421—for the butter cream in Step 5, and toasted almonds for the sides of the assembled cake, Step 6; toast the almonds for both after the meringues have baked, and the *pralin* takes but a few minutes.)

2) *The meringue-almond mixture—pâte à Succès*

- ¾ cup egg whites (6 egg whites) at room temperature
- A clean, dry bowl and clean, dry electric-mixer blades
- ⅛ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp cream of tartar
- 3 Tb sugar
- 1½ tsp vanilla extract
- ⅛ tsp almond extract
- The almond-sugar-starch mixture from Step 1
- The assembled pastry bag

Place egg whites in bowl and start beating at moderately slow speed for 1 to 2 minutes, until they are foamy. Beat in the salt and cream of tartar; gradually increase speed to fast, taking a minute or so, until egg whites form soft peaks. Continuing at fast speed, gradually beat in the 3 Tb sugar, and continue until egg whites form stiff, upstanding peaks. Beat in the vanilla and the almond extracts.

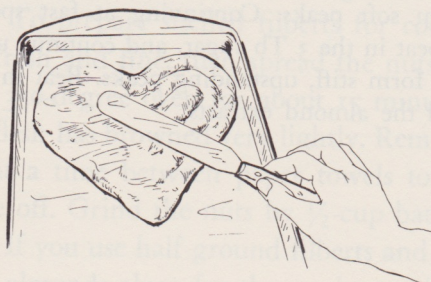
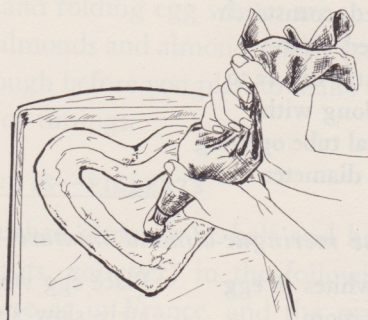
If you are using a standing mixer, remove bowl from stand; the rest of this operation continues rapidly by hand and your object here is to deflate the egg whites as little as possible—they must continue to hold their volume so that you can form the meringue shapes for baking. Sprinkle about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the almond-sugar-starch mixture over the beaten egg whites; cutting and folding with rubber spatula, delicately blend the two together, rapidly rotating bowl with one hand as you fold with the other. When almost blended, sprinkle on more of the mixture, rapidly fold in, and continue with the rest until all is used; reach all over bottom and sides of bowl with the final addition. The whole blending process should take less than a minute; scoop the meringue into the pastry bag, all of it or as much as will fit in easily.

3) *Forming the 3 meringue disks—les fonds à Succès*



Squeeze out a line of meringue the width of your thumb and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch high all around inner side of line marked on your baking sheet.

Continue around and around until you have filled the entire space with meringue.



Smooth top of meringue lightly with a spatula. Immediately make the 2 other meringue shapes in the same manner, using the other baking sheet for the third meringue.

(a less!)

4) *Baking—about 40 minutes at 250 degrees*

Set baking sheets on the upper-middle and lower-middle levels of preheated oven. The meringues are actually to dry out rather than bake; they will not puff up, and they will not change shape, but they will color lightly during baking. They are done as soon as you can gently push them loose from the baking surface, in 30 to 40 minutes. As soon as they are done, slip them carefully with a spatula onto cake racks to cool. They bend a little when still hot from the oven, but rapidly crisp as they cool; they are fragile and break easily, but a crack or break is not a disaster because the meringues are to be covered with frosting and filling.

(They get brittle + break if overcooked!)

5) *Butter cream for frosting and filling—
crème au beurre à l'anglaise*

- 1 cup sugar
- A wire whip or hand-held electric beater
- 6 egg yolks
- A heavy-bottomed enameled or stainless saucepan 2- to 2½-quart size
- ¾ cup hot milk
- A wooden spoon
- 12 to 14 ounces (3 to 3½ sticks) chilled unsalted butter
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 Tb kirsch, dark rum, or strong coffee

Make a *crème anglaise* (custard sauce) as follows: gradually beat sugar into egg yolks and continue beating for several minutes until mixture is thick and pale yellow. In a thin stream of droplets beat in the hot milk, and set mixture over moderate heat. Stir slowly with wooden spoon, reaching all over bottom of pan, for 4 to 5 minutes or until sauce thickens enough to film spoon with a creamy layer—do not let it come to simmer, but you must heat it to the point where it thickens. Immediately remove from heat and beat vigorously for 1 minute to cool slightly.

If you wish to continue with an electric mixer on a stand, scrape the custard into the mixer bowl; otherwise proceed with hand-held electric beater (or with a wire whisk). Cut the 3 sticks of chilled butter into ¼-inch slices and add a piece or two at a time, beating vigorously as butter melts and is absorbed; when all the butter has gone in, cream should be cool, smooth, and glossy, like a thick mayonnaise. Beat in the vanilla and kirsch. (If mixture turns grainy, soften rest of butter by beating it or working with fingers, and beat in successive tablespoons until butter cream smooths out.)

for the frosting:

- 2 ounces unsweetened baking chocolate, melted

Remove ¼ of the butter cream to a small bowl, stir the smooth melted chocolate into it, and reserve for frosting top of cake, end of next step. Stir the *pralin* into the remaining butter cream; this will be the filling.

for the filling:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup almond *pralin*
(ground caramelized
almonds, page 421)

Pralin butter cream must have enough body to hold its shape as a filling; chill if necessary. Chocolate butter cream must be perfectly smooth and free of lumps when it covers top of cake: beat well, if necessary, before using.

6) *Assembling the cake*

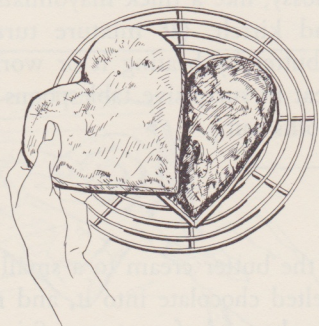
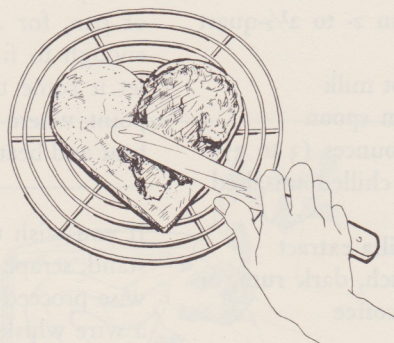
A tray or baking sheet
to set cake rack on

A flexible-blade steel
spatula

1 cup flaked, shaved,
slivered, or chopped
blanched almonds,
toasted

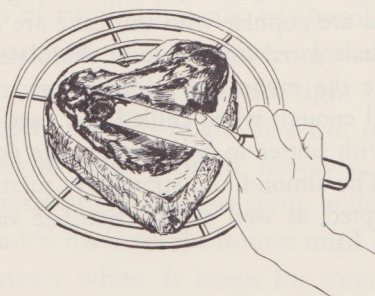
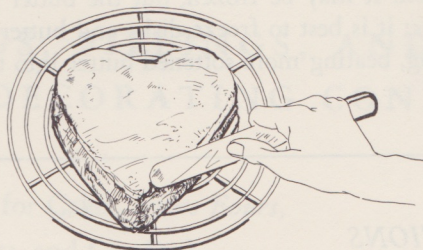
One by one, place meringues on a cutting surface, set the marker you used in Step 1 on top, and trim meringues with a small, sharp knife. This is so that edges will line up properly when circumference of cake is iced. Return 1 meringue to cake rack set over tray.

Spread $\frac{1}{3}$ of the *pralin* butter cream
over the meringue on the cake rack.



Center second meringue on top of
first, and spread with $\frac{1}{2}$ the remain-
ing *pralin* butter cream. Cover with
the final meringue.

Spread remaining pralin butter cream evenly around the edges of the cake with a spatula.



NOTE: You may prefer to spread almonds around sides of cake (following illustration) before icing the top; proceed in either order you wish, whichever seems easier for you. *Spread the chocolate-flavored butter cream as evenly as possible on top of cake with a spatula.*

Either *balancing cake on the palm of one hand* or leaving on rack, whichever you prefer, *brush almonds against sides of cake all around.*



The cake is now finished unless you wish to make fancy rosettes, swags, or other decorations on top with chocolate butter cream pushed through a pastry bag; French *pâtissiers* often write the name *Le Succès* on top of the cake in butter cream or white frosting.

7) *Serving—after at least 2 hours of refrigeration*

Transfer cake to a serving dish, and cover with a large bowl or a plastic dome; refrigerate. Cake should be chilled at least 2 hours to firm the butter cream. To serve, cut into serving slices as you would any layer cake.

(*) AHEAD-OF-TIME NOTES: *Le Succès* will keep perfectly for several days under refrigeration. It may be frozen, but the butter cream will probably lose its creamy smoothness; it is best to freeze disks and butter cream separately, then assemble before serving, beating more softened butter into thawed cream, if necessary, to reconstitute it.

VARIATIONS

Other fillings

A complete list of frostings and fillings is on pages 508–9, including recipes from both volumes. Other butter creams that are popular with this cake are Mocha-flavored butter cream with *pralin* plus Mocha-colored fondant, and chocolate butter cream with chocolate icing. Other ideas are the *mousse au chocolat* used for the *Saint-Cyr* on page 428, which stands up well enough when chilled and need not be frozen, and the other and richer mousse with butter in Volume I, page 604, into either one of which you could fold *pralin*. The almond and strawberry mixture for *charlotte Malakoff* could be deliciously adapted, as well as the chocolate variation following it (Volume I, pages 605–7).
