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[Fourth of July dessert has roots in Australia](#)

- Flo Braker

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Is sense memory stronger than brain recall? It must be. Because I can still taste desserts I ate years ago as though it were yesterday. In the 1990s, I visited Australia and selected Pavlova from the dessert menu. The pristine white meringue was magical -- crisp on the outside yet marshmallow-like inside -- with ruby-colored fruit peeking out on top.

Then, when I was dining at a New York City brasserie two years ago, you guessed it, a Pavlova dessert that instantly recalled my Australian vacation years earlier. It also reignited old questions about duplicating this simple yet sophisticated dessert.

What is the best way to form the oversized, perfectly round meringue? How do you make a clean, neat opening on top to fill it with fruit without shattering its delicate crisp shell? And how do you make it hollow enough inside to provide enough space for the filling?

After some trial and error, the answers to these questions come from the popular Pavlova recipe itself. Pavlova is a meringue similar to the standard American hard meringue that is so familiar to many of us (egg whites, sugar and flavoring).

For the Pavlova, the meringue has egg whites, sugar and flavoring, too. The difference is, it also includes cornstarch and cream of tartar or vinegar.

Cornstarch, similar to flour, contributes to the meringue's crisp exterior and at the same time thickens or sets up the interior portion just enough that it bakes soft and a bit gooey.

An acid like cream of tartar or vinegar stabilizes the egg whites' structure so that they hold up longer without collapsing before setting during baking.

Piping the meringues larger than the standard two-bite cookie size (best known as meringue drops or kisses) makes sturdy shells, which are perfect for filling and easy to handle.

If you're short on time, you don't have to pipe the meringue. Spoon mounds onto a parchment paper-lined baking sheet and shape into 3-inch rounds with a rubber spatula. With the back of a spoon, spread the meringue in the center of each mound to create a raised ridge around the outside to provide a cuplike shape to hold the fruit filling.

A long, slow bake (technically drying rather than baking) in a moderately low oven is essential. You're aiming for a delicate balance between a soft and fluffy inside and a crisp outside.

Later, after they cool completely, you'll be able to cut cleanly across the top with a sharp knife to create an opening to cradle the whipped cream and fresh fruit filling.

The meringue for Pavlova can be piped into different forms, or spread thinly in a large pan, baked, and filled with lemon curd or whipped cream and rolled up like a jelly roll.

Often referred to as the national dessert of Australia (Pavlova hails from New Zealand, too), Pavlova was created in 1935 by chef Bert Sachse of the Esplanade Hotel in Perth for afternoon tea. This extremely light meringue was named in honor of Anna Pavlova, the famous Russian ballerina who stayed at the Esplanade whenever she toured the region.

After assembling the Pavlovas with their red, white and blue filling (and their meringue "lids" on straight or set askew) feel free to decorate them with paper American flags in honor of July 4.

Even with all the food that accompanies this festive national holiday, I guarantee a showstopping meringue dessert, with its patriotic colors and contrasting textures, will be something you'll remember for quite a while.

Fourth of July Pavlovas

This is an Australian dessert with a patriotic American filling

INGREDIENTS:

The Meringue:

1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar or 2 teaspoons white wine vinegar or distilled white vinegar (see Note)

1 1/2 level tablespoons cornstarch

1 1/2 cups granulated sugar

3/4 cup (6 ounces, about 6) large egg whites

Pinch salt

The Filling:

1 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

2 teaspoons dark rum

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 pint fresh raspberries, picked over

1 pint fresh blueberries, picked over

Small paper American flags glued on toothpicks, optional decoration

INSTRUCTIONS:

For the meringues: Place rack in the middle of the oven and preheat the oven to 275°. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper. Have on hand a large pastry bag, either a reusable or a clear-plastic disposable one. An 18-inch pastry bag is ideal, but a 15-inch pastry bag also works. Cut off a 2 1/2-inch piece from its tip. Pour the vanilla and vinegar (if using) into a small cup. Stir the cornstarch into the sugar in a small bowl.

In a large bowl of a heavy-duty mixer, fitted with the whisk attachment, whip the egg whites, cream of tartar (if using) and salt on medium speed until soft peaks form when the whisk is lifted, about 2 minutes. Increase speed to medium-high and slowly and gradually sprinkle in the sugar and cornstarch mixture until glossy, stiff peaks form when the whisk is lifted, 4 to 5 minutes. Add the vanilla and vinegar (if you didn't use cream of tartar) in the final moments of whipping.

Without delay, spoon meringue into the pastry bag. Pipe the meringue into 8-10 large round mounds that are 3 inches wide on the baking sheet. Place baking sheet in the oven. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes or until the meringues are crisp, dry to the touch on the outside, and white -- not tan-colored or cracked. The interiors should have a marshmallow-like consistency. While baking, if the meringues begin to color or crack, reduce the temperature 25 degrees. When finished baking, remove the meringues from the oven and place them on a wire rack for at least 20 minutes or until completely cool. Whether you're planning on using these an hour after baking or up to 3 days later, carefully lift them from the baking sheet, and place them in a single layer in an airtight container at room temperature.

For the filling: Whisk the heavy cream, sugar, rum and vanilla with an electric mixer on medium speed just until soft peaks form.

To assemble: Gently cut off the top quarter to third portion of each meringue with a thin, sharp knife. Set them either on a platter or individual plates. Fill each with a spoonful of whipped cream, then spoon the fruit over the whipped cream, leaving the edge of the shell uncovered. Place a meringue lid on top each serving. Serve soon after filling the meringues. (Spoon any remaining filling into a bowl and pass as an accompaniment.)

Note: Use either cream of tartar or vinegar in the recipe, not both.

Yields 8 to 10 meringues

PER MERINGUE: 255 calories, 3 g protein, 42 g carbohydrate, 9 g fat (5 g saturated), 33 mg cholesterol, 39 mg sodium, 2 g fiber.

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