

THE CROQUEMBOUCHE

Croquembouche (pronounced **crockenbush**) are beautiful towers of pastry cream-filled profiteroles held together with caramelized sugar. It is a truly impressive centerpiece, yet surprisingly easy to make. If you want an easier option, you can of course make individual profiteroles and top each one with melted milk chocolate.

This recipe makes one croquembouche 11 inches (27 cm) tall and 4 inches (10 cm) in diameter at the base. Serves 15 people.

CHOUX PASTRY

1 cup (250 mL / 8.4 fl oz) water
 ½ cup (75 g / 2.6 oz) butter
 1 cup (160 g / 5.6 oz) plain or all-purpose flour
 4 eggs (180 g / 6.3 oz)

PASTRY CREAM

4 egg yolks (60 g / 2.1 oz)
 ¾ cup (164 g / 5.8 oz) sugar
 3 tablespoons (30 g / 1.1 oz) plain or all-purpose flour
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 2 cups (500 mL / 16.9 fl oz) milk

CRISPY CARAMEL & ANGEL HAIR

½ cup (150 mL / 5 fl oz) water
 2 cups (450 g / 15.9 oz) sugar
 1 tablespoon (21 g / 0.7 oz) glucose syrup or light corn syrup

ASSEMBLY

Violas a.k.a. violets (or other small edible flowers)

CHOUX PASTRY

Heat the oven to 425°F (220°C).

Place the water and butter in a saucepan and heat until melted. Add the flour all at once and stir until the mixture thickens and leaves the sides of the pan. Continue to stir over heat for another 60 seconds until it forms a really stiff ball. Remove from the heat and add the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition using electric beaters.

Place into a piping bag and pipe small dollops about the size of a strawberry onto the baking sheet. Allow a little room for spreading, as choux pastry puffs up in the oven.

Bake for 20 minutes or until golden and crisp.

PASTRY CREAM

Whip together the egg yolks, sugar, flour, and vanilla. Place the milk in a pan and heat until it just begins to boil. While whisking, add a little of the hot milk into the egg yolk mixture. Whisk in the remaining hot milk and return the mixture to the pan. Stir over high heat until thickened. Place in a heatproof bowl and cover with plastic wrap, then push the wrap down so it is touching the surface of the pastry cream. Allow to cool to room temperature.

CRISPY CARAMEL AND ANGEL HAIR

Make this element after your croquembouche is assembled as it needs to be used immediately. Place the sugar, water, and glucose syrup into a pan over high heat, stirring until the sugar is dissolved. Wash down the sides of the pan with a wet pastry brush. Leave bubbling over high heat unstirred for about 6 minutes or until it just starts to go golden. Watch carefully from 4 minutes onwards as it can turn from golden to burnt very quickly. Remove from the heat. Carefully pour a spoonful of your caramel into a glass of cold water and check that it sets solid. If it is still soft or can be squashed, then put the pan back over the heat for one more minute and repeat the test. (Be extra careful with this step as the caramel is hotter than boiling water.)

ASSEMBLY

Place the pastry cream into a piping bag or a Ziploc bag with the corner cut off. Make a small hole in the side of each profiterole and pipe in the pastry cream until you feel the profiterole just start to bulge.



Make a cone out of cardboard that is 27 cm (11 inches) tall and 10 cm (4 inches) in diameter at the base. Secure it using staples and sticky tape. Check that it stands up straight, then line the inside of the cone with nonstick baking paper.

The caramel will absorb moisture from the air and soften, so the following step should be done within 1 hour of serving.

Secure your cardboard cone upside down. Wear two silicone gloves on each hand to protect you from the heat of the caramel. Dip one half of a profiterole into the hot caramel, then place it inside the pointy end of the cone. Continue to place caramel dipped profiteroles all the way around the inside edge of the cone until you get to the top. Allow it to cool for 10 minutes. Place a plate on top and flip over so that the cone is now sitting upright. Remove the cardboard and then the baking paper, leaving you a cone of profiteroles.

Place some baking paper over a deep container so the paper goes up over each side and down in the middle. Cut the loops off a wire whisk so you have prongs, or alternatively use two forks. Dip the prongs into the slightly cooled caramel and run your tool back and forth across the container to make fine strands of caramel or "Angel Hair." If your caramel has set too firm, you can either reheat it on the stovetop or make a fresh batch. Once you have a good amount of finely pulled sugar, wrap it around the croquembouche. Repeat to make more, then wrap it around the top. Add the edible flowers. Serve your croquembouche immediately.

Video tutorial for this recipe can be found at howtocookthat.net/cookbook

