

Chocolate éclairs

Lord Preston, owner of Nunnington Hall in North Yorkshire, was Ambassador to the Palace of Versailles and as tribute to his time in such a prestigious position the chefs here have developed the recipe for these elegant éclairs. I like to imagine them served on the beautiful French porcelain displayed in the Drawing Room.

Makes 14

Prep 30 minutes

Cook 18–20 minutes

CHOUX PASTRY

Little butter for greasing

150ml/¼pt water

55g/2oz unsalted butter,
diced

1 tsp caster sugar

70g/2½oz plain flour

Pinch sea salt

2 eggs, beaten

FILLING

225ml/8fl oz double cream

ICING

55g/2oz dark chocolate,
chopped

1 tsp butter

2 tbsp water

85g/3oz icing sugar, sifted

To make the choux pastry, preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6. Lightly grease a large baking sheet with a little butter.

Add the water, butter and sugar to a medium saucepan and heat gently until the butter has melted. Bring to the boil, take the pan off the heat, sieve in the flour and salt and then quickly return to a high heat and stir constantly for 2 minutes until the mixture thickens and forms a smooth ball that leaves the sides of the saucepan cleanly. Stand the saucepan in cold water to cool for 20 minutes.

Gradually add the beaten eggs, mixing well with a wooden spoon or electric mixer until smooth.

Spoon the choux paste into a large piping bag fitted with a 1cm/½ inch plain tube. Pipe 7.5cm/3 inch lengths on to the greased baking sheet. Bake for 18–20 minutes until well risen and crisp.

Slit down one side of each éclair with a sharp knife to allow the steam to escape then transfer to a wire rack and leave to cool.

Lightly whip the cream in a bowl until it forms soft swirls. Spoon into a piping bag fitted with a slightly smaller tube then pipe into the éclairs.

Set a heatproof bowl over a saucepan of gently simmering water so that the bottom of the bowl doesn't touch the water. Add the chocolate, butter and water to the bowl and heat gently, stirring occasionally until the chocolate has melted.

Stir in the sieved sugar a little at a time until smooth and glossy.

Spoon the chocolate icing over the top of the éclairs then smooth with a small palette knife. Leave in a cool place to set.

