

Strawberry Napoleons (more or less)

*from **In Our Grandmothers' Kitchens***

Ingredients:

for the base:

1 sheet puff pastry (your own or frozen; I used frozen)

for the pastry cream (crème patissière):

1 cup milk

1/2 cup sugar

3 tablespoons flour

1 pinch salt

2 egg yolks, slightly beaten

1 tablespoon vanilla

for assembly:

a little strawberry juice (created by sugaring up a few berries and leaving them for a half hour)

confectioner's sugar as needed

melted jam as needed (optional but helpful)

lightly whipped cream (optional)

fresh strawberries, sliced and MAYBE lightly sweetened

Instructions:

Bake the pastry according to the directions of the manufacturer. Let it cool, and transfer it onto a work surface. While it is cooling, you may make the pastry cream.

In a heavy pan, heat the milk until it is hot, but do not let it come to a boil. Combine the sugar, flour, and salt in a bowl, and stir in the milk. Beat the mixture. Return it to the pan, and stir constantly over low heat for 4 to 6 minutes until it becomes thick and smooth.

Add a bit of the warm mixture to the beaten egg yolks, and then add a bit more; then stir the egg yolks into the pastry cream. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes, until the mixture resembles a thick custard. Cool, stirring every 5 minutes or so, and then stir in the vanilla.

When the pastry cream has cooled (allow at least half an hour for this), make a little glaze for the top of your Napoleons by stirring a little juice into 1/4 cup of confectioner's sugar. If you wish to be extra decadent, fold whipped cream into the pastry cream. (I'm just fine without it myself.)

Now you are ready to assemble your Napoleons. Cut the pastry into six pieces in the long direction of its rectangle and three pieces in the wide direction to make 18 rectangles. (Cut carefully and use a sharp knife; these steps help!) Each Napoleon will have three layers.

If you want to use jam as a glue (it does help), brush a little melted jam on the top of six pieces of pastry. Dab pastry cream on top, followed by some strawberries. Add the next layer of pastry, topping it with another layer of jam (optional), cream, and berries.

Top with the last six pastry rectangles, and drizzle glaze on top. (You may also place another strawberry on the top if you wish.) If your Napoleons tend to slide apart, use a toothpick judiciously. Serves 6.