



FLAMING BAKED ALASKA CUPCAKES



As a young man, I was told that Delmonico's chef Charles Ranhofer invented baked Alaska—cake and ice cream under a blanket of toasted meringue—to commemorate the U.S. purchase of the Alaskan territory in 1867. I've heard a lot of competing theories since then, but I still believe Delmonico's deserves the credit. Originators aside, Delmonico's certainly made baked Alaska famous. Baked Alaska is enjoyed all over the world. Letty Alvarez, who competed on TLC's *Cupcake Wars*, created this variation.



Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a cupcake pan with baking cup liners. Sift the flour, baking powder, and salt into a medium bowl. In a large mixing bowl, cream the butter and sugar until fluffy and light in color. Add the eggs one at a time, beating to incorporate between additions. Beat in the vanilla extract. Add about one third of the flour mixture, then about one half of the milk. Add about half of the remaining flour mixture, then add the remaining milk, and, finally, add the remaining flour mixture. Divide the batter evenly among the cupcake liners, filling them about two-thirds full. Bake in the preheated oven until a toothpick insert emerges dry, 15 to 20 minutes. Cool on a wire rack.

Remove the ice cream from the freezer and place the carton on a microwave-safe plate. Microwave at 15-second intervals, checking in between each interval, until very soft. Transfer the ice cream to a mixing bowl (reserve container).

MAKES 12 CUPCAKES

CUPCAKES

1 ½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour
¾ teaspoon baking powder
1 pinch salt
1 stick (8 tablespoons) unsalted butter, room temperature
¾ cup sugar
2 large eggs
1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract
⅔ cup whole milk

FILLING & MERINGUE

1 pint vanilla ice cream
1 teaspoon almond extract
5 egg whites
¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ cup sugar
About 2 cups brandy

Add the almond extract and mix with a wooden spoon until incorporated. Return the ice cream mixture to the container and refreeze.

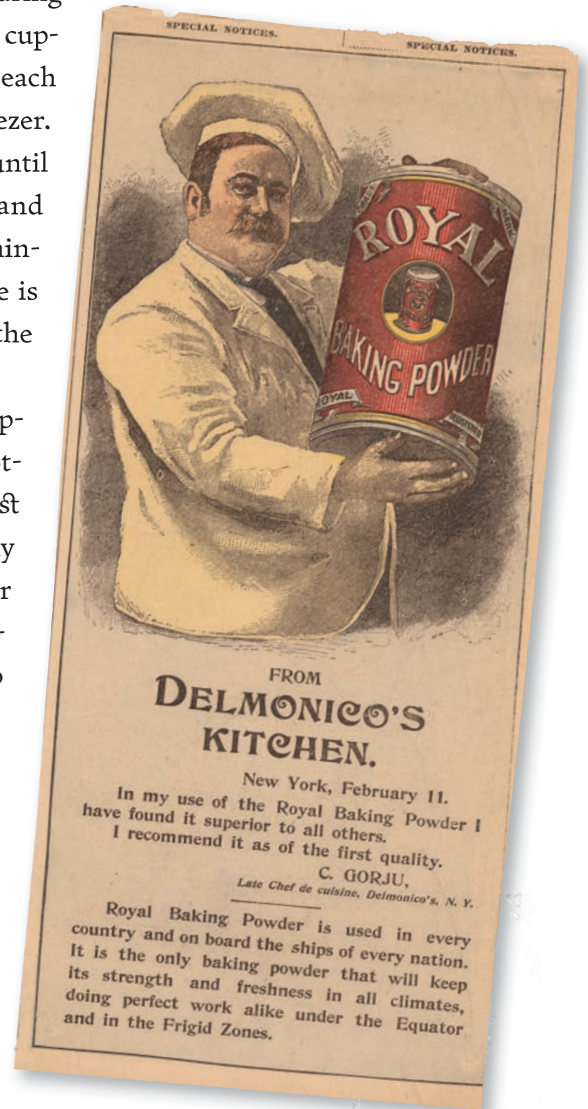
Peel away the cupcake liners and discard. Using a paring knife, cut a small circular hole in the top center of each cupcake. Using a melon baller or small cookie scoop, fill each hole with ice cream. Place the filled cupcakes in the freezer.

Place the egg whites in a large mixing bowl. Beat until foamy, about 1 minute. Add the cream of tartar and vanilla and beat until soft peaks form, another 1 to 2 minutes. Gradually beat in the sugar until the meringue is stiff and glossy, another 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer half the meringue to a pastry bag fitted with a large star tip.

Remove the cupcakes from the freezer. Set each cupcake on a heatproof plate. Pipe meringue from the bottom to the top to cover the cupcakes completely. Toast them with a kitchen torch until the meringue is evenly browned. (Alternatively, brown the meringue under the broiler, not too close to the heat source, 1 to 2 minutes.) Flambé with the brandy (see The Delmonico Way below). Enjoy immediately.



THE DELMONICO WAY: Baked Alaska was a signature dessert at the restaurant, and the tableside flambé a hotly anticipated moment of dining theater. To flambé the cupcakes, place about 2 tablespoons of the brandy in a metal 13-ounce saucière (similar to a gravy boat) and carefully light it with a long match or lighter. Carefully ladle the remaining brandy into the saucière. Pour the flaming alcohol over the cupcakes evenly, then allow the flames to subside before eating. This Oldelmonico technique has been adopted by Ralph Lauren's Polo Bar and is sure to dazzle your guests. Of course, when working with a live flame you must always be very, very cautious. High-alcohol liquors such as Bacardi 151 or Everclear are too flammable and dangerous. Professional chefs steer clear of them, and so should you.





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