

Spring is here and Easter is upon us. Many families have holiday traditions that can't be broken for probably some not-so-good reason. In spite of that, I want to share with you a great special dessert that deserves a place at your Easter feast.

This special dessert is a pavlova. Never heard of it? Read on and take notice.

Not surprisingly this dessert was named - some say created - in honor of the famous Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova. Toward the early end of her career, she toured the "down under" to rave reviews. It was in New Zealand or Australia that this dessert was made and served.

There is great and needless debate over its "original" origin. My vote goes for the Kiwis. But it's the final product we are talking about.

A pavlova is a meringue cake topped with whipped cream and fresh fruit. It is said to have been inspired by Mme. Pavolva's tutu and the roses that adorned it. Sounds good to me.

The dessert is simple to make. You can do fancy things if you wish. But it will be good and very pretty if you take the easy road.

Meringue is stiffly beaten sweetened egg whites and that are baked to dry and set them. They also color slightly in the process.

For a pavlova you need very fine sugar to use for sweetening. It will dissolve much quicker and you won't over beat the egg whites. Don't stress over finding superfine sugar. Just take regular granulated sugar and whiz it in your food processor for a minute. Presto. You have it.

The most important thing about beating egg whites is to have no grease or oil on what you are using. Make sure the mixer bowl and beaters get a trip through the dishwasher and are cooled in the fridge before using.

The trick for a pavlova is to add a little cornstarch and vinegar to the beaten egg whites about half way through the process. This helps the consistency of the interior. It needs to be a little creamy. 3 or 4 egg whites will make a 7-inch cake.

After you have the stiffly beaten egg whites ready, you need a cake pan or a sheet pan. In either case you want to make a place for your egg whites using parchment paper. Waxed paper is OK, too.

Line the 8-inch or smaller cake pan with the paper. The better way is to draw a 7-inch circle on a sheet of paper and cut it out. Use an inverted bowl as a guide. Then lay the circle in the center of your sheet pan.

Pile the egg whites on the paper and fill the circle completely. Leave a little well in the center for your whipped cream later. You can use a spatula for this process. Or put the egg whites in a pastry bag and pipe them. This will make for a very pretty result. As an alternative, pipe on just the final top layer with a circle around the perimeter. There's your well.

You can score the outside or make a pattern for a custom look. Or just use it "as is." It will still look good.

Bake the meringue in a 300-degree oven for an hour. Turn the oven off and allow the meringue to stay inside until the oven cools. This will firm the outside perfectly.

You can use the meringue then or store for a couple of days in a cool dry place.

Whip heavy cream with just a little sugar if you must. The meringue will be sweet enough. Whipped cream in an aerosol can or tub is fine for this. Stay away from whipped topping. It's the wrong flavor.

Just before serving fill the well with the whipped cream. If it sits too long, the meringue will begin to soften.

Arrange cut fruit on top of the whipped cream. You can just toss it on or make an attractive pattern. Strawberries and kiwi look great together – like the red and green on that tutu. So do peaches and blueberries. Whatever you pick remember that tart fruits work better with all the sweet you have already.

There you have it – a pavlova ready to slice. It is a stunning dessert. The crisp exterior and the creamy interior will amaze you. The whipped cream will coat your mouth with joy. The fruit is just a bonus in the process. Your eyes and tummy will be very happy.

If you like, you can make individual pavlovas. The presentation won't be as effective but the taste will still be great. It won't take as long to bake the smaller meringues.

Individual meringues are available already baked and ready to use. They will not be as creamy on the inside as the ones you make. Just make a well for your whipped cream and proceed.

If there's a certain dessert, say like carrot cake, that you must have at Easter, go for it. But consider adding a luscious pavlova along side. It might be a new tradition in the making.