**Éclairs**

(recipe has been halved)

Makes about 6 eclairs

**For the Choux Paste:**

3 tablespoons (42 ½ grams) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

2 teaspoons sugar

1/8 teaspoon salt

¼ cup water

¼ cup milk

½ cup (65 grams) all purpose unbleached flour

2 large eggs

**For the filling and glaze:**

1 ½ cups Vanilla Pastry Cream

1 ounce semi sweet chocolate

1 tablespoon butter

**Method:**

For the Choux paste:

1. You will need a baking sheet, a pastry bag, a 3/4-inch tip for piping shells, a 1/4-inch plain tip for filling the eclairs.
2. In a non-convection oven, plan to bake one sheet at a time. Preheat the oven to 400° F with a rack in the lower third.
3. Make a parchment paper template the size of your baking sheets as follows: Draw 2 sets of heavy parallel guidelines 4 1/2 inches apart (to make 4 1/2 inch éclairs shells). Flip paper over onto baking sheet.
4. Whisk the whole eggs together briefly.
5. Put the butter, sugar and salt with water and milk in heavy bottom saucepan. Bring the liquid to a simmer over medium heat, stirring frequently so that butter is completely melted by the time the liquid simmers.
6. If it seems like the butter will not be melted in time, slide the pot off the burner and stir until the butter is melted, then return the pot to the burner and continue.
7. When the liquid is simmering, dump all of the flour into the pot and commence stirring briskly with a wooden spoon or spatula until all of the flour and liquid are blended and form a stiff paste resembling mashed potatoes, with no patches of dry flour.
8. Continue stirring—spreading, and mashing the paste over the bottom of the pan and gathering it back together again—for 4 to 5 minutes to cook the flour and dry the paste sufficiently to absorb the eggs that will be incorporated in the next step. Some crust will form on the sides and bottom of the pot (don’t try to scrape and blend it back into the paste)—and your arm will be tired before you are finished.
9. Turn the hot paste into a bowl and mix with a spoon for 3 to 5 minutes until the paste has cooled to 103 degrees.
10. While you beat the mixture, pour a little more than half of eggs in a slow, steady stream. Scrape the sides and bottom of the bowl as necessary, and if the mixture does not form a cohesive mass, mix more.
11. Once the eggs are beaten in, stop mixing. If the batter is glossy and soft enough that it falls very slowly from a big spoon—no more egg is needed. Beat the paste for another 2 minutes.
12. If the batter is dull and does not slump or fall slowly, judiciously add some more egg. (Combine all leftover egg and set aside for egg wash—whisked with a little water until paint-able—and/or breakfast.)
13. Form and bake the choux: Set the template upside down on a baking sheet. Fit the pastry bag with the large tip and fill with the paste. Pipe 6 or 7 fat fingers, 4 1/2 inches long, on the template.
14. Use a natural bristle pastry brush to brush the fingers lengthwise with water or egg wash. (Dip the brush and remove excess liquid against the side of the bowl before brushing).
15. Rake the brushed fingers gently with the tines of a fork. (Brushing and raking all help the shells to expand more evenly in the oven—if your piping is not smooth or even, use the brush to even them up.)
16. Set the baking sheet with choux on a second baking sheet (turned upside-down if rimmed) and set the ensemble in the oven. (Double sheeting protects the bottoms of the shells from becoming too dark before the shells are fully baked). Bake 15 minutes without opening the oven. Shells should be puffed and golden. Rotate the baking sheet front to back and turn the oven down to 375° F. Bake 15-18 minutes until the shells are more brown than golden brown (pale shells will be under-baked inside, soft on the outside, and may collapse as they cool).
17. Transfer individual shells from the pan to a cooling rack.
18. While shells are still hot drill two holes in the bottom of each one as follows: insert the tip of a paring knife one inch from one end of a shell and rotate it like a drill until the hole is slightly larger than 1/4 inch. Repeat one inch from the opposite end of the shell. (Holes release steam and are handy for filling later). Let shells cool completely.

**For the filling and glaze:**

1. When shells are completely cool, you can fill them with cream or freeze them for another day. Fresh or frozen, shells can be re-crisped (without thawing) on a baking sheet in a preheated 375 F oven until very hot to the touch, 6-8 minutes. Twice baking is not only an excellent hack whenever shells do not turn out quite as crispy as you want them to be, but might even make the best shells of all!
2. To fill éclairs, scrape the pastry cream into a clean, dry, pastry bag fitted with the plain 1/4-inch tip. Cradle a shell in your palm and insert the tip of the bag into one hole. Squeeze cream into the shell until it wants to ooze back out. Repeat with the second hole. Scrape off any cream that has oozed and set the éclair right side up on a tray. Repeat with the remaining éclairs. Chill before glazing.
3. Make the glaze: Melt the chocolate with the butter in a stainless steel bowl set directly in a wide skillet of almost simmering water. Stir frequently until the chocolate is almost entirely melted. Remove the bowl from water and stir to finish melting the chocolate. Use immediately or set aside until later.
4. To glaze éclairs, cool freshly made glaze (or gently reheat glaze that has set) to 88-90 F and pour it into a container long enough to fit an éclair, such as a small loaf pan, or a wide bowl. Dip the top of each filled pastry into the glaze. Refrigerate immediately to set the glaze. Store éclairs in the refrigerator. They are best within 8 hours of filling, but still darned good for another day or two.

**Pastry Cream**

(recipe has been halved)

Makes about 1 cup

1/3 cup sugar

1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1 cup milk

1 egg

1 tablespoon butter

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

**Method:**

1. Whisk the sugar, flour, and cornstarch in a small heavy-bottomed, non-reactive saucepan.
2. Whisk in about half of the milk until blended.
3. Beat the egg in a small bowl until thoroughly blended. Add the remaining milk. Pour into the saucepan.
4. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, sweeping the bottom, sides, and corners of the pan to prevent scorching.
5. When the first bubbles appear, set a timer for 2 minutes and continue to cook and stir, adjusting the heat to maintain a gentle simmer.
6. Immediately scrape the custard into the strainer.
7. Stir the custard to pass it through the strainer, but don’t press on any bits of cooked egg if any are left behind.
8. Scrape the custard clinging to the underside of the strainer into the bowl as well.
9. Add the butter and vanilla, stir to melt the butter and mix it into the custard. Stir for a minute or two to slightly cool the custard.
10. Cover with plastic wrap pressed directly against the surface of the custard to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate until needed, up to 3 days.