

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### All The Sweet Fluffs

There must be something about sweet fluffy foods that makes our tongues happy. Look at all the different kinds of sweet fluff we can choose from - whipped cream, meringue, marshmallows and ice cream are the traditional ones. But there are also marshmallow fluff, several varieties of frozen whipped topping, plus spray cans of 'whipped' cream toppings too. They might all be fluffy, but choosing one over another could make a big difference in your recipe.

Probably the oldest is whipped cream. We'll never know who first tried to whip cream, but the results were delicious and we're still doing it. The only trick to making whipped cream is to have enough cream. Plain milk won't whip, there's not enough fat. To whip, cream has to have at least 30% fat. Light cream, coffee cream, and half-and-half, despite their names, have too little cream to whip. The fat is necessary because during whipping it starts sticking to itself and gets stiff. If you whip it too long, all the fat sticks together and you will find a bowl full of butter!

Spray cans of whipped cream are not really whipped. Some are real cream, others may be mixtures of cream and vegetable oils. The cream is fluffed by putting a lot of pressurized gas into it. The gas is usually some form of nitrogen. It does nothing to us, just makes lots of little bubbles. Usually sugar is added, as well as gum or something else to stabilize it. When you push on the button gas and cream come rushing out, gas bubbles expand, and the the cream stiffens around the bubbles. Most of them have enough cream that they must be kept refrigerated to be safe.

Ice cream is based on cream, but instead of fat or gum to catch and hold all the little air bubbles, it depends on the cold. Without beating air bubbles into it ice cream would be a rock-solid block. Freezing the cream while beating makes the fat stiff. Then it melts when it warms. Hopefully, that happens on our tongues! Many ice creams, especially the less expensive ones, also use gums to help hold the air bubbles.

Frozen whipped toppings have only a little bit of real cream. Mostly they're a mixture of hydrogenated vegetable oils, sugar or sweeteners and more gums, whipped to beat air into the mixture. All the gum is why they'll hold their shape a lot longer than whipped cream will, even after

they're thawed. But vegetable oils, sugar and gum just don't taste as good as real whipped cream.

Meringues are completely different creatures. These are made with egg whites. Now instead of fat or gum catching and holding all the air bubbles, in meringue it is egg protein that does the catching. As air is whipped into the egg whites the proteins are stretched and stretched. They catch onto other proteins and make a net to trap the air bubbles. The air helps to dry them out and stiffen them too.

Plain meringue will eventually lose its bubbles, leak water and go flat. If we add a little bit of acid (lemon juice or cream of tartar) it will help the proteins hold their shape. Or we can cook the proteins into shape by beating hot sugar syrup into them. That is Italian meringue. It's used for cake toppings, cookies or other sweets that need to stay stiff longer.

True marshmallows are stiffened by sap from marshmallow root or stem. Marshmallow fluff and crème depend on egg whites or gelatin, but are mostly corn syrup and sugar. They don't need the refrigeration that whipped cream or frozen toppings do, but the texture is different too. And they are so sweet they're used instead of jelly on peanut butter sandwiches in some parts of the country. Care for a fluffernutter sandwich? They are real!

This is an old recipe that uses 2 different kinds of fluff, meringue and whipped topping. Use light whipped topping to reduce the fat, and don't tell your children about the crackers in the crust!

#### Depression Strawberry Pie

3 egg whites	½ tsp cream of tartar
1 cup sugar	18 saltine crackers, crushed
8 oz frozen whipped topping, thawed	1 tsp vanilla extract
3 cups frozen, sliced sweetened strawberries	1 cup pecans, chopped

Preheat oven to 325° F. Beat egg whites until foamy. Add cream of tartar and beat until stiff peaks form. Add sugar and vanilla gradually, beating constantly. Fold in cracker crumbs and pecans. Coat 9 inch pie plate with cooking spray. Spread egg mixture in plate. Bake for 30 minutes. Cool on wire rack. Thaw and drain berries, mix into whipped topping. Spread over meringue crust. Chill until serving. Serves 8.

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