

Liguria

THE COOKBOOK

Recipes from the Italian Riviera
Laurel Evans



RIZZOLI
NEW YORK



Pandolce Genovese

Genoa's Christmas Cake

Pandolce is to Genoa what the now-famous *panettone* is to Milan. This compact, fruit- and nut-filled Christmas cake is obligatory in Liguria during the holiday season. Steeped in history, folklore, and tradition, *pandolce* is adorned with a sprig of bay leaves to symbolize Christmas, and brought to the table by the youngest family member. The oldest of the family cuts the first slice, which is wrapped in cloth given to the first alms-seeker who passes by.

Legend credits the city's sixteenth century Doge, Andrea Doria, with challenging local pastry chefs to create a dessert representative of Genoa's wealth and grandeur, a competition that presumably resulted in the invention of *pandolce*, but it was more likely the creation of the city's under celebrated housewives.

At historic Pasticceria Profumo you'll find both the "tall" version of the cake, *pandolce alto*, painstakingly prepared with sourdough starter, and the "short" version, *pandolce basso*, made with baking powder. This recipe, inspired by Profumo's, is for the latter, which is infinitely easier to prepare at home, yet still includes all the ancient flavors and aromas of this legendary dessert.

Note: Orange flower water, a distillate made from bitter orange blossoms, has been produced in Liguria for centuries and shows up in many local sweets. Look for it online or in specialty food shops, or substitute with a half teaspoon finely grated orange zest.

2 ⅓ cup (10 ½ ounces) all-purpose flour,
plus more for dusting
1 teaspoon baking powder
⅛ teaspoon salt
½ cup unsalted butter, at room
temperature
½ cup granulated sugar
Seeds from ½ of a vanilla bean
1 large egg
¼ cup lukewarm milk
1 tablespoon orange flower water
⅓ cup (1 ½ ounces) pine nuts
¼ teaspoon fennel or anise seeds
½ cup finely chopped candied
orange peel
1 ½ cups (8 ounces) raisins

Makes one 9-inch cake

◆ Preheat the oven to 350°F, line a baking sheet with parchment paper; set aside. In a medium bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, and salt; set aside.

In a large bowl, beat together butter, sugar, and vanilla until creamy. Add the egg and beat on high speed until fluffy. Slowly beat in milk and orange flower water until combined. Stir in pine nuts, fennel seeds, candied orange peel, and raisins.

Slowly add the flour mixture to the egg mixture and stir to combine, but do not overmix. The mixture will be dense, and you might need to use your hands to incorporate all the flour. Turn the dough out onto a lightly flour-dusted work surface. Shape the dough into a smooth ball and transfer to the prepared baking sheet. Press gently to flatten slightly. Score a large triangle shape on the surface of the dough (this traditionally represents the Holy Trinity). Cook until golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the middle of the cake comes out clean, 35 to 45 minutes. Let cool before serving.