

HOLIDAY COOKIES

From early December onwards, I love to make a variety of small cookies that I give away to friends, neighbors, my children's teachers, etc.—and, of course, I always keep some at home for teatime or sweet snacks throughout the day. Here are three simple recipes that are always a big hit.

LEMON-THYME SHORTBREADS

Makes 2 dozen cookies

ACTIVE TIME: 15 minutes

COOKING TIME: 15 minutes per batch

CHILLING + COOLING TIME: 50–55 minutes

INGREDIENTS

1¾ sticks (7 oz./200 g) unsalted butter, at room temperature • 1 cup (7 oz./200 g) superfine sugar • 1 egg • 1 tsp vanilla extract • Finely grated zest of 1 lemon, preferably organic • Leaves of 3–4 sprigs fresh thyme • 2¼ cups (10 oz./280 g) all-purpose flour

For the icing

1 egg white • 1 tbsp lemon juice + a little finely grated zest • Confectioners' sugar as needed • Leaves of 3–4 sprigs fresh thyme

Cream together the butter and sugar in a mixing bowl, then beat in the egg and vanilla extract. Stir in the lemon zest and thyme, followed by the flour. Roll the dough between two sheets of

parchment paper to a thickness of about ¼ in. (6 mm) and chill for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C/Gas Mark 4). Cut out 1½–2-in. (4–5-cm) disks using a plain cookie cutter and place on two baking sheets lined with parchment paper. Chill for 10 minutes, then bake for 15 minutes, until lightly golden. Let cool. To prepare the icing, whisk together the egg white, lemon juice, and zest in a bowl, then gradually whisk in confectioners' sugar until the icing is the consistency you want (I like mine pretty thick). Spread a little icing on top of each cookie and sprinkle with thyme. Let set for 10–15 minutes.

HOLIDAY BISCOTTI

Makes 15–20 cookies

ACTIVE TIME: 10 minutes

COOKING TIME: 35 minutes

COOLING TIME: 5–6 minutes

INGREDIENTS

Scant ½ cup (3½ oz./100 g) brown sugar • ¼ cup (2 oz./50 g) superfine sugar • 2 tsp vanilla extract • 1 tsp bitter almond extract • 2 eggs • 2 cups (9 oz./250 g) all-purpose flour • 1 tsp baking powder • 2 pinches fleur de sel • Scant 1 cup (3½ oz./100 g) dried cranberries • ¾ cup (3 oz./90 g) shelled pistachios • ⅔ cup (3 oz./90 g) toasted blanched almonds

Preheat the oven to 340°F (170°C/Gas Mark 3). In a mixing bowl, whisk together the brown sugar, superfine sugar, vanilla extract, almond extract, and eggs until combined. Stir in the flour, baking powder, and fleur de sel, then add the cranberries and nuts. Mix well with your hands to make a dough, then shape into two logs about 2¾–3¼ in. (7–8 cm) wide and 7–8 in. (18–20 cm) long. Place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and bake for 25–30 minutes, until lightly golden. Remove from the oven, let cool for 5–6 minutes, then cut each log crosswise into 7–10 slices. Place the slices cut side down on the baking sheet, lower the oven temperature to 325°F (160°C/Gas Mark 3), and bake for an additional 8–9 minutes, until dry. Let cool. Feel free to experiment with different spices, dried fruits, or nuts.

PECAN-PISTACHIO BITES

Makes about 30 cookies

ACTIVE TIME: 20 minutes

COOKING TIME: 10–12 minutes

COOLING TIME: 8–10 minutes

INGREDIENTS

2 sticks (7¾ oz./220 g) unsalted butter, diced and softened • ⅔ cup (3 oz./80 g) confectioners' sugar, plus extra for dusting • A few drops of vanilla extract • 2 pinches fleur de sel • 2½ cups (10½ oz./300 g) all-purpose flour • Generous ½ cup (2½ oz./70 g) pecan halves • Generous ½ cup (2½ oz./70 g) shelled pistachios



Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C/Gas Mark 4). Place the butter, sugar, vanilla extract, and fleur de sel in a large bowl, and beat until combined. Stir in the flour. Grind the pecans and pistachios to a powder, leaving a few larger pieces, and mix into the dough. Roll into balls slightly smaller than golf balls and place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake for 10–12 minutes, until lightly golden. Let cool for about 10 minutes, so the cookies firm up and don't crumble when removed from the sheet. Place a little confectioners' sugar in a soup plate and roll the cookies in it until well coated.

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