



Panforte & biscotti: Edible gifts workshop

Panforte aka Siena Cake

Ingredients:

3/4 cup whole almonds, blanched or skin on

1/4 cup hazelnuts

1/3 cup dried apricots

1/3 cup candied citrus peels (orange and lemon)

Dried figs and dates (optional but gives a nice chew)

2/3 cup standard flour (can be gluten-free)

2 tablespoons cocoa powder

1 1/2 teaspoon good ground cinnamon

60 g dark chocolate

1/3 cup sugar (for a less dry version, do 1.5x the amount of sugar and honey)

1/2 cup honey (for a less dry version, do 1.5x the amount of sugar and honey)

Pinch salt

icing sugar (for sprinkling)

Method:

1. Cut baking paper to fit bottom of 20cm well-buttered round or square cake pan, then butter the paper.
2. Preheat oven to 160c.
3. Chop almonds, hazelnuts, apricots, fruit, orange and lemon peel.
4. Mix well with flour, spices, and cocoa.
5. Melt chocolate in a bain marie and set aside to cool. Then add to the floury nut/fruit mix.
6. Put sugar and honey in a saucepan, stirring over medium heat until sugar is dissolved. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes or until it reaches 115c.



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7. Pour the melted sugar/honey mix over the nuts and fruit mix and stir well.
8. Press the batter into the pan and pat flat.
9. Bake for 25 minutes.
10. Let cool in pan.
11. Remove cake from pan, sprinkle with icing sugar (use a mesh sieve)
12. Wrap in foil or in a tin to preserve whole.
13. Or cut into thin wedges. I like to trim all the edges, then slice the panforte into uniform slices to gift.

Note: Wrapped in aluminum foil or a tin to stay air-tight, it will keep for weeks, even months, refrigeration not needed.

Cantucci (aka biscotti)

The original biscotto is from Prato in Tuscany and didn't contain any fat. Being free from moisture, these biscotti keep very well and became a favourite of sailors and other travellers embarking on long journeys. Also known as cantucci, they are full of almonds and often flavoured with amaretto or lemon. Hard biscotti are usually dunked in vin santo (Italian sweet dessert wine) or a coffee to soften. Today in Italy, most cantucci contain a portion of butter except for those not baked the second time.

For this recipe, I tested and retested multiple times with different flours, quantities of eggs and flavourings, wanting to keep it as traditional as possible. I've kept it butter and oil-free to allow the cantucci to keep for longer at room temperature.

They make a nice Christmas gift. I wrap mine in brown paper or cellophane, tied with a ribbon, or place in cute small tins with personalized labels. You could give them on their own or with a bag of good coffee or a bottle of port or wine or Tuscan vin santo if you're feeling flush.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup caster sugar
- 1 egg + one yolk
- 1 t vanilla
- ½ t almond extract
- 1 t marsala wine



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1 cup flour, sifted
¼ cup almond flour
½ t baking powder
½ t salt
Zest of ½ lemon and ½ orange
½ cup whole almonds, blanched or skins on

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F/180°C.
2. Spread almonds onto baking tray and toast in the oven for 5-10 minutes. Allow to cool.
3. Leave the oven on. Line a large baking tray or two smaller baking trays with non-stick baking paper.
4. Place flour, lemon zest, baking powder and salt into a medium bowl and combine.
5. In a separate bowl, whisk together the eggs and sugar and flavourings (vanilla, almond extracts and any alcohol). Slowly add in the dry ingredients but don't mix too much.
6. As the mixture starts to come together add the almonds. The dough should still be a bit sticky.
7. Turn out onto the lightly floured surface. I usually dump the dough onto the prepared baking sheet, in a log shape, then dust with flour and use the baking paper to shape into a nicer log shape. I aim for a log that's 5 cm wide. A plastic dough scraper is super helpful for shaping the sticky dough.
8. Bake 20 minutes until lightly browned.
9. Removed from the oven and cool on baking trays for 15 minutes.
10. Reduce oven to 300°F/150°C.
11. While still warm, cut each log into 15-18 slices using a sharp chef's knife.
12. Arrange cut side up, onto lined baking trays and return to the oven for 10-15 minutes.
13. Cool on a wire rack and store in an airtight container.