



Cuccidati (Italian Fig Cookies)

Posted By Vera On December 21, 2008

Maybe not so photogenic, these cookies are amazingly good. There are a lot of similar recipes around, and I, myself, have tried about four or five of them. But I'm not in search for the perfect recipe anymore, I'm quite content and happy with this one. I bake exactly the same cookies for three years in a row for Christmas (they are traditional Italian Christmas cookies) and every single recipient always raves. They are a bit time consuming to make, but a prep, broken in stages, makes it relatively easy to put together.

Adapted from Gourmet magazine

Makes about 6 dozens

For the filling:

1 cup packed soft dried Mission figs (8 oz), hard tips discarded

3/4 cup raisins (3 3/4 oz), plumped

3/4 cup mild honey

1/4 cup brandy

1 1/2 teaspoons finely grated fresh orange zest

1 teaspoon finely grated fresh lemon zest

1 tablespoon ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

3/4 cup whole almonds (4 oz), toasted and coarsely chopped
3/4 cup walnuts (3 oz), toasted and coarsely chopped

For the dough:

4 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
2 sticks (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1/2 cup whole milk
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh orange

For the Icing:

1 cup confectioners sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
1 1/2 to 2 tablespoons fresh orange juice
A few drops of natural orange oil (optional but very good)

Make the filling:

Pulse the figs and raisins in a food processor until finely chopped, then stir together with the remaining filling ingredients in a bowl. Chill, covered, at least 8 hours.
The filling can be made 1 week ahead and chilled, covered.

Make the dough:

Whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl. Add the butter and blend with your fingertips or a pastry blender (or pulse in a food processor) just until the most of the mixture resembles coarse meal with some small (roughly a pea-size) butter lumps. Add the eggs, milk, vanilla, and zest and stir with a fork (or pulse in the food processor) until a soft dough forms (starts to form – for the food processor method; do not overprocess). Halve the dough and gather each half into a ball, then flatten each half into a rough 6- by 4-inch rectangle between sheets of plastic wrap. Chill until firm, at least 8 hours.

The dough can be chilled, wrapped in plastic wrap and then foil, up to 3 days.

Form the cookies:

Center an oven rack and preheat oven to 350°F. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or silicone mat. Set aside.

Roll out 1 rectangle of dough (keep the remaining dough chilled) into a 1/8-inch thick

rectangle, about 15- by 14-inch, on a well-floured surface with a floured rolling pin. Trim the edges to form a rectangle with one side exactly 13-inches long; another side can be as long as it can be assuming you rolled it evenly thin (chill the trimmings). Then cut the 13-inch side into 4 (3 1/4-inch-wide) strips. Arrange a little bit less than 1/8 of all filling in a 1-inch-wide log lengthwise down the center of each strip, then fold the sides of each strip up over the filling to enclose it, pinching edges together to seal. Turn the rolls seam-sides down and press gently to flatten the seams. Chill the logs, covered with plastic wrap, for about half an hour before slicing and baking. Cut the logs crosswise with a sharp knife into 1 1/2-inch-wide slices and arrange 1/2 inch apart on the prepared baking sheet. Make more cookies in the same manner with the remaining chilled dough, trimmings (reroll once), and filling.

Bake the cookies, in batches, until golden around edges, about 30 minutes. Transfer the cookies to a cooling rack and cool until warm, about 10 minutes. Glaze until the cookies are still warm.

Make the icing while the first batch of cookies is baking:
Whisk together the confectioners sugar, vanilla, and enough orange juice to make a pourable icing.

Brush the icing on the warm cookies. Let the icing to dry completely before packing the cookies for storing.

The cookies keep, layered between sheets of parchment paper, in an airtight container at room temperature for 1 week.