



Hazelnut and Fig Linzer Cookies

Lovely linzers! Two delicately crisp and slightly sweet hazelnut cookies sandwiched together with a generous filling of fragrant ruby red fig jam will leave your taste buds dancing for more. Traditionally made with ground almonds and raspberry jam, we love this variation of buttery hazelnuts and luxurious figs, inspired by an abundance of our Pastry Princess's favorite fruit. Full of plump, sweet fruit, the jam is also incredibly delicious alone or served on toast or with a variety of cheeses.

Makes 2-3 dozen

Ingredients

For the cookies:

1 cup butter, softened
¾ cup sugar
¼ cup light brown sugar
1 ¼ cups hazelnuts, toasted
2 egg yolks, or 1 whole egg
1 teaspoon vanilla
zest of 1 orange, finely grated
2 ½ cups all purpose flour, plus extra for rolling the dough
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon salt
Confectioner's sugar for dusting

[Chef's Note: You can substitute hazelnut flour or meal for the whole hazelnuts. Made of very finely ground hazelnuts, the flour or meal can be found in specialty stores and online retailers.]

For the fig jam filling:

2 pints ripe fresh black mission figs, rinsed, stems removed and halved
1 ½ cups sugar
4 tablespoons butter
Juice of 1 orange
¼ cup ruby port or brandy (optional)

Equipment

Food Processor
Mixer

Preparation

Prepare the cookies:

Preheat oven to 325° F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper or non stick baking mats.

Place the hazelnuts and ¼ cup brown sugar in the work bowl of a food processor and pulse until the nuts are finely ground. Sift together the flour, baking powder, cinnamon and salt; set aside.

Beat the butter, the remaining sugars and the hazelnuts in a large bowl with the paddle attachment of an electric mixer until smooth and fluffy. Beat in the yolks, then the vanilla and fully incorporate. Add the sifted flour mixture, and on low speed, mix until just combined.

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Form the dough into a ball, cut in half, flatten into a disk and wrap each half in plastic. Chill the dough until firm, at least 2 hours and up to 3 days.

Roll out one half of the dough into a 1/8 inch thick rectangle on a lightly floured surface. Using cookie cutters, cut out as many cookies as possible from the dough. With a spatula, carefully transfer the cookies to the prepared baking sheets and place about 1 inch apart. Using a smaller cutter of the same shape, cut out the centers from half the cookies (this will form the top of the sandwich); reserve the scraps and re-roll with the other chilled half of dough. Repeat this process with the other half of the dough, and chill all the cookies for 30 minutes.

Bake the cookies in the preheated oven until the edges are golden, about 10-12 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

[Chef's Note: It may be easier to remove the cut out cookies if the dough has been chilled again once cut, before it is moved to the baking sheet.]

Prepare the fig jam:

Finely chop the figs. Place the sugar in a non-reactive saucepan and cook over medium heat to a medium caramel color (it should be golden amber in color). Add the butter, the chopped figs and the orange juice and stir to incorporate all. Don't worry if any of the sugar starts to lump, it will melt as soon as everything is combined. Simmer rapidly over medium heat, stirring frequently to prevent sticking, until the figs are very soft, most of the liquid has evaporated and the mixture is thick and syrupy, about 25 minutes. Once reduced the mixture will also have an amazing ruby red color. To test if the jam is ready, carefully spoon a small amount of the jam onto a plate and let it sit in the refrigerator for a minute. Run your finger down the middle of the jam, and if the line remains in two distinct halves, it is at the proper consistency. Cook longer if the two halves meld back together.

Remove the pan from the heat and deglaze with the port. Stir to thoroughly combine; return the pan to the heat and continue to cook, allowing the alcohol to absorb into the jam and the mixture to thicken once again, for about another five minutes.

[Chef's Note: For an easier method, the jam can also be made without first making a caramel: Just combine the figs, sugar, butter and orange juice in a large saucepan, bring to a boil and continue to boil until thick and syrupy, about 20 minutes. Deglaze the pan with the port and cook for another 5 minutes until all of the alcohol is absorbed into the jam. However, taking the time to make the caramel first imparts a depth of flavor and additional color to the finished jam.]

Service

Spread a small amount of the fig jam on the cookie bottoms. Sandwich with the cookies with the middles cut out. Dust the cookies with confectioners' sugar and enjoy!

Variations

Feel free to substitute a variety of nuts (almonds, pistachios, cashews, macadamia nuts) for the hazelnuts. Other jams are lovely, too, but we just adore the combination of ripe figs and toasty hazelnuts.

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