



CRAVE-WORTHY COOKIES

• Text and photos by PASCALE PEREZ-RUBIN

I've made so many different kinds of cookies in my life, there'd be no way to count all of them. Some are filled with jelly or cream, while others are folded over in a complicated fashion. The common denominator is that they all are somehow connected to my late mother, Esther.

She would make crunchy orange-blossom cookies with sesame seeds and ground almonds that she would store in beautiful metal containers. Over the years, I've learned many new techniques that have allowed me to reproduce many of the cookies that I remember munching on as a child. If you add a little more liquid, or a little more oil, the texture changes, and I love playing around with the ingredients until the cookies come out perfectly.

I think that hot summer days are actually the perfect time to make cookies, which are a great snack to eat with hot or cold tea. My family loves eating cookies with rosetta almond drink or cold lemonade.

One recipe is my mother's La Petite cookies and another is my mother-in-law Gita's cookies. The third is Balkan cookies and the fourth Moroccan "machine" cookies.

BIZCOCHOS

These delightful cookies hail from Spain. You can top them with cinnamon, nigella or sesame seeds or aniseed.

Makes 40 cookies

4 large eggs
1 cup sugar
¾ cup oil
¼ tsp. salt
2 tbsp. arak
1 tsp. vanilla extract or lemon zest
5 cups flour, sifted
1½ tsp. baking powder

Coating:

1 egg
1 tbsp powdered sugar

Toppings:

¼ cup sesame seeds
¼ cup nigella or black sesame seeds

In a large bowl (can use an electric mixer), beat eggs with sugar, oil, salt, arak, vanilla or lemon zest. Gradually add the flour and baking powder. Knead until smooth.

Take a little dough and roll out into shape of a cigar and then connect ends to form a ring with a 6-cm. diameter. Place rings on a tray covered with baking paper. With a knife, make indentations about 1 cm. apart. This will give the cookies a nice look. In a separate bowl, beat egg with powdered sugar and then spread coating on cookies (two layers) and then sprinkle with seeds.

Bake in an oven that has been preheated to 160° for 30 minutes or until golden. Let cool and then store in an airtight container.



MOROCCAN 'MACHINE' COOKIES

These cookies are made using an old-fashioned meat grinder.
Makes 65-70 cookies

- 1 kg. flour minus 1 cup (about 7 cups)
- 2 packets baking powder
- 1 package margarine
- 1 cup oil
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 packets vanilla sugar
- 1 cup orange juice
- ¾ cup sesame seeds
- ¾ cup coconut flakes
- 1 egg

Put all the ingredients in a large bowl and mix well. You can use an electric mixer with a dough hook if you prefer.

Let dough rest for 15 minutes. In the meantime, add the special cookie attachment to the meat grinder.

Split the dough into four sections. Add each section of dough to the grinder. Cut each strip into cookies that are 9-10 cm long. Place evenly on a tray covered with baking paper.

Bake in an oven that has been preheated to 180° for 15-20 minutes until cookies are golden brown. Let cool completely and store in an airtight container at room temperature.

ESTHER'S LA PETITE COOKIES

Makes 80 cookies

- 6 eggs
- 1¾ cups sugar
- 1¼ cups canola oil
- Zest and juice of 1 medium lemon
- Zest and juice of 1 medium orange
- 3 packets vanilla sugar
- 1 Tbsp. orange-blossom water
- 3 packets baking powder
- ½ cup almonds or hazelnuts, finely ground
- 1½ Tbsp. aniseed
- 1 kg. flour, sifted

In a large bowl, beat eggs while adding sugar, oil, lemon and orange juice, lemon and orange zest, vanilla sugar, orange-blossom water and baking powder. Mix until light and fluffy. You can also use an electric mixer and beat for 4-5 minutes.

Gradually add almonds or hazelnuts, aniseed and flour while mixing. Mix until smooth. You can add more juice or water if necessary. Form cookies with greased hands and place evenly on a greased pan (or use baking paper). Bake in an oven that has been preheated to 180° for 25-30 minutes until golden brown.

Remove from oven and let cool. Store in an airtight container.

TIPascale

You can find orange-blossom water in specialty stores. You can also use 2-3 drops of quality almond extract instead.



SAVTA GITA'S COOKIES

Every woman in Tripoli had her own secret recipe for these cookies. In my opinion, my mother-in-law Gita's version is the best.

Makes 80-85 cookies

- 4 eggs
- 1½ cups sugar
- 2 packets vanilla sugar
- 300 gr. margarine, melted
- Zest from 1 lemon
- Zest from 1 orange
- ¾ tsp. baker's ammonia
- 2 packets baking powder
- 1 kg. flour, sifted

In a bowl, beat eggs and sugar together until smooth (can use electric mixer if desired). Add the vanilla sugar and stir well.

While stirring, add the melted margarine, zest, baker's ammonia and baking powder. Gradually add the flour while stirring (you may not need to use all the flour – it depends on how much is absorbed in the liquid). Place the dough in the fridge for 90 minutes or overnight. Remove from fridge and let sit for 30 minutes, then knead again.

Take a handful of dough and knead it in your hands. Form cigar shapes and then connect ends to form rings with a diameter of 6 to 7 cm. Place the rings on a greased tray and make criss-cross indentations with a knife.

Bake in an oven that has been preheated to 180° for 20 minutes. Store in an airtight container.

Translated by Hannah Hochner.

TIPascale

Baker's ammonia can be found in spice shops. It helps make the cookies crunchy.

