



Mary (Shulz) Casserino's Italian Fig Cookies (Cucidati)

(Even though Mary is not Italian, she married an Italian and cooks Italian food better than some Italians! You may want to make the filling one day and finish the cookies the next day.)

Ingredients:

Filling:

- 2 cups dried figs, hard tips discarded
- 1½ cups dried pitted dates
- 1 cup raisins
- ¾ cup whole almonds, toasted and coarsely chopped
- ¾ cup whole walnuts, toasted and coarsely chopped
- ½ cup orange marmalade
- ½ cup honey
- ¼ cup brandy (more if you're going to drink some, too)
- 1 teaspoon finely grated fresh orange zest
- 1 teaspoon finely grated fresh lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves

Dough:

- 4 cups of flour
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 sticks butter, cut into ½ inch cubes
- 1 large egg
- ½ cup milk
- 1 tablespoon vanilla
- 1 egg white beaten with 1 tablespoon water for egg wash
- Colored sprinkles for decorating

To make the filling, in a food processor (or by hand), combine figs, dates and raisins and process to finely chop. Place the mixture in a medium bowl, add remaining filling ingredients and stir to combine. Cover and refrigerate for at least 8 hours.

To make the dough, in a large bowl combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt and whisk to combine. Add the butter and blend with fingertips until most of the mixture resembles coarse meal.

In a medium bowl, beat the egg, milk and vanilla together. Add to the dry mixture and stir to make a rough dough. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead until smooth, about 5 minutes. Cut the dough into 4 pieces, cover and refrigerate for 45 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 375°. Lightly grease 2 large baking sheets.

On a lightly floured surface, one at a time, roll out each piece of dough into a 12-inch square. Cut the dough into 4 by 3-inch rectangles. Spoon 2 tablespoons of filling down the center of each rectangle. Fold the long sides of each rectangle inward to the center to enclose the filling; pinch the edges to seal. Turn the cookies seam-sides down and press gently to flatten the seams. With a floured knife, cut the logs crosswise into 1½-inch wide slices and arrange ½-inch apart on the baking sheets. Brush with egg wash and decorate with colored sprinkles. Bake until golden brown, about 20 minutes.

Transfer to wire racks to cool. Serve warm or at room temperature.