

Almond Chocolate Toffee

Makes About 1 ½ Pounds

Ingredients

- 2 cups (200 grams) sliced almonds
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter
- 2 cups sugar
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 tsp molasses
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 150 grams bittersweet chocolate (I use Lindt 70% dark), melted and cooled (but still spreadable)

Special Equipment

- candy thermometer
- baking sheet lined with parchment or a nonstick baking mat
- lightly oiled off-set palette knife (a regular knife will do, but an off-set knife is easier)
- a silicone pastry brush placed in a cup of water

Cooking Instructions

Preheat oven to 375F.

Spread the nuts on a parchment-lined baking sheet, in a single layer. Bake about 7 – 10 minutes until the nuts are golden and aromatic. Set aside. When they've cooled, ensure the nuts are spread evenly on the parchment as you'll be pouring hot toffee directly onto them.

In a deep, medium-sized heavy saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the sugar, water, molasses and salt. Gently stir to combine then clip a candy thermometer to the side of the pot, ensuring the thermometer does not touch the bottom of the pan. Once the mixture starts to boil, stop stirring. Brush down the sides of the pan occasionally with a pastry brush dipped in water to wash down any sugar crystals.

Cook the toffee until the mixture reaches a few degrees over 300F on a humid day and 295F when humidity is not an issue.

Remove the saucepan from heat, and working quickly, stir in the baking soda. This will cause the sugar to bubble up so be very careful.

Pour the mixture over the almonds. Use a lightly-oiled off-set palette knife to spread the toffee, if necessary.

When the toffee has firmed a bit and is still warm, spread on the melted chocolate. Allow the mixture to cool, then break into pieces.

Keep in an airtight container in a cool dry place. It lasts for several weeks.

Linzer Torte Cookies

Makes About 30 2" Cookies

Ingredients

- 1 cup whole almonds, outer skin intact
- 1/4 cup granulated white sugar
- 1/2 cup golden (light) brown sugar, firmly packed
- 2 cups all purpose flour, plus extra for rolling the dough
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature**
- Zest from one small washed lemon
- 1 large egg

Topping

- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1/2 cup Raspberry or Apricot Jam

Special Equipment

- 2 same-shaped cookie cutters, one smaller than the other (for the cut-out)
- 2 baking sheets lined with parchment or a non-stick baking mat
- small piping bag or sandwich bag with a small hole cut from one corner – optional but handy

Cooking Instructions

** To use butter is straight from the fridge, measure 1 cup, then grate the firm butter into a bowl. This will soften the butter without having to wait for it to come to room temperature.

Note: Before the cookies are baked, they're placed on a baking sheet and firmed in the fridge. If your fridge looks anything like mine, you'll need to make room. Alternatively, firm the unbaked cookies on a plate lined with parchment, then transfer them to a baking sheet when firm.

Preheat oven to 350F.

Spread the almonds on a baking sheet in a single layer, and bake until lightly browned, about 8-10 minutes. When the nuts have cooled, tip them into a food processor with the white sugar and process until finely ground.

In a separate bowl mix together the flour, cinnamon, allspice, baking powder and salt.

In the bowl of standup mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, or a medium bowl, beat the butter with the brown sugar and lemon zest until the mixture is light and fluffy (about 2-3 minutes). Beat in the egg, ground almonds and the flour mixture until well incorporated.

Scrape the dough from the bowl, divide in half, and shape each portion into a squat disk. Working with one portion of dough at a time, place the dough on a sheet of parchment lightly dusted with flour. Cover with another sheet of parchment or plastic wrap and, using a rolling pin, flatten the disk to about 1/4" thick. Refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes. (Properly covered, the dough will keep for about 3 days in the refrigerator.)

Remove one portion of dough from the refrigerator and run a hand over the parchment to make sure it's rolled out evenly. Adjust if necessary with a rolling pin.

Stamp out the cookies with the larger cookie cutter and place half on the prepared baking sheet, about 1 inch apart. Refrigerate about 15 minutes before baking. Use the smaller cookie cutter to stamp out the centers from the remaining cookies. Place on the prepared baking sheet, about 1 inch apart and refrigerate for about 15 minutes before baking.

Re-roll any scraps of dough and cut out the remaining cookies.

Bake for 10 – 12 minutes, or until lightly browned around the edges, rotating the pans once to ensure even browning. Remove from oven and cool on a wire rack.

The fun part: Spread a thin layer of jam on the underside of the cooled full cookies (good side facing down). Place the cooled cut-out cookies on a sheet of parchment (good side facing up). Place the powdered sugar in a small sieve and dust the cookies with the sugar.

Carefully, so as not to mar the sugar, place the sugar-dusted cookies on top of the jam-layered cookies, pressing them together.

Using a small spoon, jam-filled piping bag or sandwich bag, fill in the heart cut-out with additional jam.

Refrigerate in an airtight container for several days.

Nutty Coco Bites

Makes About 36

Almond Pastry

- 2 1/4 cups unsweetened shredded coconut, divided (1 1/2 cups for the filling; 3/4 cup for the coating)
- 1/4 cup organic coconut oil
- 8 ounces dark chocolate, chopped (I prefer 70% cocoa)
- 8 Medjool dates, pitted and finely chopped
- 1 1/2 cups sliced almonds
- 6 Tbsp flaxseed meal
- 1/2 tsp kosher salt

Special Equipment

- You'll need two parchment lined baking sheets.

Cooking Instructions

Preheat oven 375°F.

Spread the coconut on a parchment-lined baking sheet and toast just until golden, about 3-4 minutes, stirring every minute or two to prevent burning.

Place a medium heatproof bowl over a saucepan filled with an inch of simmering water (the bowl should not touch the water.) Place the coconut oil and dark chocolate in the bowl and stir until melted.

Remove the chocolate mixture from the heat and add the dates, almonds, flaxseed meal, salt, and 1 1/2 cups toasted coconut. Mix the ingredients together until well combined. Using a spatula, scrape the chocolate mixture onto a sheet of parchment and pat the mixture down to about 1" thick. (No need to be neat — this is only to cool the mixture quickly.) Transfer to the fridge to firm.

When the mixture has firmed enough to hold its shape (but not so firm that it's too difficult to shape) use a small ice cream scoop, melon baller, or spoon, to portion round balls, about 1" in diameter, onto a parchment-lined baking sheet. (These needn't be perfect at this stage — they'll be rolled by hand when they're coated with coconut.) Transfer to the fridge or freezer until firm.

Place the remaining toasted coconut in a shallow dish (a pie plate works well). Roll each chocolate portion in coconut and re-shape into a ball using the palms of your hands.

Serve at room temperature. Store covered in the refrigerator.

Evy's Shortbread Cookies

Makes About Five Dozen 1.5" Cookies

Ingredients

- 1 pound unsalted butter
- 1 cup powdered (icing) sugar
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 4 cups all-purpose flour

Optional Toppings

- 2 Tbsp white chocolate, melted
- 1/4 cup unsalted pistachio nuts, chopped
- 1/4 cup dried cranberries, chopped

Special Equipment

- Ravioli or cookie cutter or cookie press

Cooking Instructions

Preheat oven to 300°F.

In a standup mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, or in a large bowl, cream together the butter and powdered sugar. Add the salt and baking powder and mix to combine. Add the flour, one cup at a time, and mix until a soft dough forms.

Place the dough onto a sheet of parchment paper. Cover with plastic wrap and, using a rolling pin, flatten the dough (through the plastic wrap) into a disk about half an inch thick. Refrigerate at least 40 minutes.

Stamp-out the chilled dough with a cookie cutter or ravioli mold and place onto a parchment-lined baking tray.

Bake for about 20 minutes, rotating the pan once, until the cookies are firm but not yet browned. The underside of the cookies should be barely golden. (I lift a cookie with a small metal spatula to determine the colour.) Cool on a wire rack.

If desired, dab cookies with a bit of melted white chocolate and top with a pinch of nuts or dried cranberries.