

Biscochitos

By Lisa Donovan

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8 to 12 Servings - Prep time 15 minutes, total time 55 minutes

Even as New Mexico's official state cookie and an important Christmas tradition in Hispanic and Latin American cultures, biscochitos might not seem to have anything outlandish or fancy about them, at a glance - that is, until you take a bite. Full of dynamic flavor and a delicate texture that is so pleasant to eat, over and over again (they're hard to resist), these anise-studded, orange-and-vanilla-scented bites are perfect to package as a gift, to leave out for guests to snack on or to serve alongside cajeta ice cream or a rich butterscotch pudding as part of an important holiday meal. You might also try them alongside your favorite celebration drink, like rompope, ponche or a simple hot chocolate.

Ingredients

For the dough

1/2 cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, at room temperature (see Tip)
3/4 cup (150 grams) sugar

1 tablespoon anise seeds

1 large egg
1 tablespoon grated orange zest
2 teaspoons vanilla paste or vanilla extract

2 cups (260 grams) all-purpose flour
1 cup (116 grams) yellow masa or finely ground yellow cornmeal
1.5 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon coarse kosher salt

2 tablespoons rum or brandy (optional)
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For the topping

1/2 cup (100 grams) sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
Small pinch of coarse kosher salt

Directions

1. Prepare the dough: In the bowl of a stand mixer with the paddle attachment (or in a large bowl using a hand mixer or wooden spoon), beat softened butter with sugar on medium-high until well combined, about 2 minutes.
2. While butter is creaming, toast the anise seeds in a small skillet on medium heat for 30 to 35 seconds until fragrant, just to open up the flavor. Transfer to a mortar and pestle, or crush under a heavy pan, and grind to medium fine. (Some larger bits are OK and nice for texture in the cookies.)
3. Add the egg, toasted anise seed, orange zest and vanilla to the butter mixture and beat for 2 to 3 more minutes, scraping the sides, until well combined.
4. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, masa, baking powder and salt.
5. In two additions, with the mixer on low speed, add the dry ingredients to the butter mixture, scraping down the sides of the bowl each time. Increase speed to medium-high and beat until well combined but crumbly. Add rum or brandy, if using, and beat for another 30 seconds to 1 minute, until the dough comes fully together.
6. Place the cookie dough between two pieces of parchment paper and roll out evenly to $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thickness. Freeze for at least 10 minutes, or refrigerate for 20 to 30 minutes. The cookies will keep a sharper shape depending on how cold they are when they go into the oven.
7. Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Make the cinnamon sugar topping: In a small bowl, whisk together the sugar, cinnamon and salt; set aside.
8. Once the oven is at temperature, remove the dough from the freezer, remove the top parchment layer and cut the dough with a cookie cutter into your preferred shapes, such as stars. Gather any dough scraps and combine them into a disk. Roll and repeat the cookie-cutting process, chilling as necessary.
9. Line 2 large baking sheets with nonstick baking mats or with parchment. Transfer cut cookies, spacing 1 inch apart, to the prepared baking sheets. Sprinkle the cookies with the cinnamon sugar topping.
10. Bake the cookies, rotating the sheets after 8 minutes, until the cookies are light brown around the edges but still pale in the center, 13 to 15 minutes total.
11. Cool the cookies on the sheets for 3 to 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Store the cooled cookies in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Tip

Traditionally, these cookies are made with lard or even vegetable shortening. This is recommended if you prefer a slightly crispier cookie. You would use an equal amount when replacing butter.

RG notes

- The cookies were NOT crisp the next day. I fixed that by baking in a 200 F convection oven for 10 minutes.