

Simple Food

Cranberry and pecan sugar cookies



Sweet and tender and crumbly, these sugar cookies are based on what I think is a traditional American recipe – although there seems to be an almost endless variety of sugar cookie recipes available, both in recipe books and online. It is hard to say for certain the true provenance, although I did read that the recipe can be traced back to the mid 1700s in Nazareth Pennsylvania where German Protestant settlers created a cookie that came to be known as the Nazareth Sugar Cookie and which is the official cookie of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. But at their heart they all seem to be a rich, buttery biscuit, with either icing piped or sugar sprinkled on top. I wanted to try to develop a recipe based on this concept, because the other great thing about them is that the dough can be kept in the freezer and the cookies made to order when friends drop by for tea. So here is my take, using dried cranberries and pecan nuts (very American!) The basic biscuit mixture can be varied with a host of other flavours – ginger and chopped macadamia nuts; currants and orange zest; white chocolate buttons and pistachios; chopped dates and ginger; chopped glace apricots and lemon zest, are all delicious options.

Makes 30 – 40 cookies

250 g butter, softened
2/3 cup soft icing mixture (confectioner's sugar)
2 egg yolks
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
pinch salt
2 cups plain flour
3/4 cup dried cranberries, cut in half
3/4 cup pecan nut pieces
caster sugar, extra, for dusting

In a medium sized mixing bowl beat the butter using an electric beater until soft and creamy. Add the sugar and continue beating until the mixture is well combined. Add the egg yolks, vanilla and salt, and mix well. Using a wooden spoon stir in the cranberries and pecans and then fold through the flour until a soft dough is formed. Wrap the dough in cling film and put in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes until it is quite firm. Divide the dough into two pieces and roll each one quickly into a fat sausage shape. You might need to dust your hands with a little extra flour to stop the mixture sticking to your hands or the bench top. Wrap tightly with more cling film and put back in the fridge for about an hour. At this point you can also put the dough into the freezer. It will keep well for three or four weeks, and you can whip up a batch whenever the mood strikes. When you are ready to make the cookies, preheat the oven to 165 C. Unwrap the dough, sprinkle with about 1 tablespoon caster sugar all over the outside, and, using a sharp knife cut into rounds and place about 1 cm apart on a baking sheet that you have lined with silicon paper. Cook for about 20 minutes, or until lightly golden. Cool on a wire rack and store in an airtight container. They will keep for 4 or 5 days.

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