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Bittersweet Chocolate and Hazelnut Tartlets

Bittersweet chocolate and hazelnut is one of my favorite flavor combinations. A touch of orange zest in the background helps to highlight the flavors. These are great to serve whenever you would like an elegant dessert.

Makes 2 dozen tartlets | Use twenty-four 1-5/8 x 3/4-inch round fluted-edge tartlet pans

1 cup (4-1/2 ounces) plus 1 teaspoon all purpose flour
5 tablespoons (2-1/4 ounces) granulated sugar, divided
1/8 teaspoon baking powder
Pinch of kosher or fine-grained salt
Finely grated zest of 1 medium orange, divided
1-1/2 ounces (3 tablespoons) unsalted butter, chilled
2 extra-large egg yolks, at room temperature, divided
1 to 2 tablespoons heavy whipping cream
1-1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract, divided
1/2 cup (2-1/2 ounces) raw hazelnuts
1 ounce (2 tablespoons, 1/4 stick) unsalted butter, softened
1-3/4 ounces bittersweet chocolate (62 to 72% cacao content), finely chopped

PASTRY DOUGH:

Pulse together briefly 1 cup of flour, 2 tablespoons of sugar, baking powder, salt, and zest from 1/2 orange in the work bowl of a food processor fitted with the steel blade.

Cut the chilled butter into small pieces and add it to the flour mixture. Pulse until the butter is cut into very tiny pieces, about 30 seconds. The texture will be sandy with very tiny lumps throughout.

In a small bowl, use a fork to beat 1 egg yolk, 1 tablespoon of cream, and 1/2 teaspoon of vanilla together. With the food processor running, pour this mixture through the feed tube. Process the dough until the mixture wraps itself around the blade, about 1 minute. If the dough is dry, add the remaining tablespoon of cream and process.

Shape the dough into a flat disk and wrap tightly in a double layer of plastic wrap. Chill in the refrigerator until firm before using, about 2 hours. If the dough is too cold and firm, let it stand at room temperature for 10 to 15 minutes to become more pliable before rolling out.



Bittersweet Chocolate and Hazelnut Tartlets. (continued)

On a smooth, flat surface, roll out the pastry dough between sheets of lightly floured waxed or parchment paper to a large disk about 12 inches in diameter. Carefully, peel the paper off the top of the dough and brush off any excess flour. Dip a 2-inch round plain biscuit cutter into flour and cut out circles of dough.

Gently place each dough circle into a tartlet pan and fit it against the bottom and sides of the pan. Pinch off any excess dough at the top edge of the pans. Place the tartlet pans on a baking sheet. Gather together any scraps, knead briefly, roll out, cut, and fit into the remaining tartlet pans. Chill while preparing the filling.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 350°F.

CHOCOLATE AND HAZELNUT FILLING:

Place the hazelnuts in a single layer in a cake or pie pan and toast for 15 to 18 minutes, until the skins split and the nuts turn light golden brown.

Remove the pan from the oven and transfer the hazelnuts to a kitchen towel. Fold the towel around the hazelnuts and rub them together to remove most of the skins.

Pulse together the hazelnuts and 1 tablespoon of sugar in the work bowl of a food processor fitted with the steel blade until the nuts are finely ground, about 1 minute.

Beat the softened butter in the bowl of an electric stand mixer with the flat beater attachment or in a large bowl using a hand-held mixer on medium speed until it's fluffy, about 1 minute. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons of sugar and beat together thoroughly. Stop occasionally and scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl with a rubber spatula.

In a small bowl, whisk together the remaining 1 egg yolk and zest from 1/2 orange to blend. Adjust the mixer speed to low and add the egg mixture to the butter mixture. The eggs will sit on top of the butter mixture, so stop and scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl with a rubber spatula to help mix evenly. Add the remaining 1 teaspoon of flour and chopped chocolate and blend thoroughly. Add the remaining 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract and the finely ground hazelnuts and blend thoroughly.

Use a spoon or 1-inch round ice cream scoop to place about 1 teaspoon of filling in each unbaked tartlet shell.



Bittersweet Chocolate and Hazelnut Tartlets. (continued)

Bake the tartlets for 20 to 25 minutes, until the filling is puffed and light golden brown. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and transfer it to a rack to cool completely. To remove the tartlets from their pans, gently tap each pan on the countertop.

KEEPING – Store the tartlets in a single layer on a baking sheet. Cover the tops of the tartlets with a large piece of waxed paper. Tightly wrap the baking sheet with aluminum foil and keep at room temperature for up to 4 days.

STREAMLINING – The pastry dough can be made in advance and kept in the refrigerator, tightly wrapped in a double layer of plastic wrap, up to 4 days before using. To freeze up to 4 months, wrap it in a double layer of plastic wrap and enclose it in a freezer bag. Use a large piece of masking tape and an indelible marker to label and date the contents. If frozen, defrost the dough in the refrigerator overnight before using. If it is too cold to roll out, let it stand at room temperature to become pliable.

The filling can be made and kept in a tightly covered container in the refrigerator up to 3 days before using.

ADDING STYLE – Serve each tartlet with a star, rosette or dollop of whipped cream on top.