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Pistachio Sugarplums

Makes almost 100 – Overall Prep Time: slightly more than 24 hours – Active Prep Time: 2-3 hours
– Easy – Moderately expensive – Can be frozen – Ships Well – Can be doubled and tripled --
Shelf Life: 2 weeks in an airtight container

There are countless recipes for sugarplums, and understandably so, for they have been around since the Middle Ages. This version is loaded with spices and dried fruit, shaped to resemble frosty little plums with clove “stems.”

I don't know how the Victorians managed to make sugarplums, but I think a food processor is definitely a must of modern-day sugarplum projects. Depending on the size of the processor, it may be necessary to grind the sugarplum mixture in separate batches.

4 cups (about 16 ounces) chopped pitted dates
2-1/3 cups coarsely chopped pistachio nuts
1 cup coarsely chopped dried apricots
1 cup coarsely chopped dried figs
1/3 cup brandy
4 tablespoons apricot preserves
3 tablespoons dried orange peel
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cloves
2 teaspoons ground mace
1-1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
100 whole cloves (about 2 cups) for the “stems”
1-1/2 cups sanding sugar

1. Place all the ingredients except the whole cloves and the sanding sugar in a food processor and rapidly pulse the machine on and off for 1 to 2 minutes, or until the mixture is every ground into a doughy paste and begins to pull away from the sides of the work bowl. Empty the mixture onto a clean work surface and knead it by hand for 2 minutes to completely blend all the ingredients. Wrap the sugarplum mixture tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate it for 2 hours or overnight.

2. Place teaspoon-sized scoops of the chilled sugarplum mixture between your palms. Roll the scoops into smooth ovoid shapes (to resemble small plums). Use a wooden skewer or the back of a dinner knife to impress a cleft along the length of each plum shape. Roll the plums in the sanding sugar and insert a whole clove into the fatter end of each sugarplum for a “stem.”

3. Lay the sugarplums out on a baking sheet lined with parchment and allow them to firm up in a cool, dry place overnight. Store the sugarplums in single layers in airtight containers at room temperature until you are ready to assemble and deliver the gifts.