

Cherry-Almond Holiday Biscotti

Makes about 24-30 biscotti

Biscotti are a "twice-baked" cookies. Freshly baked loaves are cut, then the slices are baked a second time. The result is a dry, crunchy **biscotto** that, in it's day centuries ago, was served packed as a non-perishable food form requiring little storage complexity for long forays into the wilds. Today, it's a coffee shop favorite and a worthy companion for virtual voyages into contemplative unknowns.

Ingredients:

2-3/4 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for dusting
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature
1 cup sugar
3 eggs
1 teaspoon almond extract
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1/2 cup dried cherries
1/2 cup almonds, coarsely chopped
1 cup white chocolate chips, divided use

Directions:

1. PREHEAT the oven to 350°F. Place the baking rack in the center of the oven. Prepare a large baking sheet, (rimmed 11" x 15", or unrimmed 13" x 16"), by lining with a silicone baking mat, or with parchment paper.
2. MIX together the dry ingredients (flour, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon) in a small bowl until evenly distributed.
3. BEAT together the butter and sugar with an electric mixer until well blended - about 2 minutes.
4. ADD the eggs and the almond and vanilla extracts. Beat again until incorporated, another 1-2 minutes.
5. CONTINUE by adding the dry ingredients to the butter mixture in two parts. Add half of the dry ingredients, beat just to combine, then add the remaining dry ingredients, again mixing only until just incorporated. Do not over mix at this stage.

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6. INCORPORATE the dried cherries, almonds, and half of the white chocolate chips (1/2 cup) into the dough just until evenly distributed.
7. DIVIDE the sticky, lumpy dough in half placing each half on a lined baking sheet.
8. FORM two loaves approximately 3 inches in width, 12 inches in length, and 1/2-inch thick with lightly floured hands. The “loaves” will be rather flat in appearance at this stage, but will puff and spread during baking.
9. BAKE the loaves for 20-25 minutes or until the tops display a lightly golden color. A light finger press in the center of the loaf will spring back when touched.
10. COOL the loaves (in place on the baking sheet) on a cooling rack until cool enough to handle – about 20-30 minutes.
11. TRANSFER the loaves to a safe cutting surface, and SLICE the loaves into 3/4-inch slices cut on a slight diagonal.
12. PLACE the slices, cut side down, on the baking sheet. (You may use the same pan still lined with a silicone baking mat, or parchment paper.)
13. BAKE the biscotti a second time in a 350°F oven for 7 minutes on one side, then turn and bake another 7-8 minutes until they begin to golden and the slices are dried out.
14. REMOVE the biscotti slices from the baking pan and transfer to a cooling rack. COOL until they reach room temperature.
15. PAINT melted white chocolate chips (using the other 1/2 cup of chips) across the tops of the biscotti. (Melt the chocolate in saucepan, double boiler, or *bain marie* over very low heat. Some people have luck melting chocolate in the microwave, but we find it more difficult to control the process and prefer melting over hot water.)
16. ADD sprinkles, if desired. ALLOW the white chocolate to harden, then package the biscotti for storage or gift-giving.