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Cinnamon Almond Dutch Letters

Makes 16 pastries

When we want to make something a little special for the holidays, we reach for our Dutch letter recipe. This flaky, sugary pastry wrapped around a cinnamon almond filling pairs perfectly with a cup of coffee. The sweet morsels beg to be enjoyed often, and prove great for gifting. Keep this recipe at the front of your holiday recipe folder!

Ingredients - Almond Filling

1 cup water
1-1/2 cups almonds
1-1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/3 cup granulated sugar
3/4 cup packed brown sugar
2 egg whites
1-1/2 teaspoons almond extract

Ingredients - Pastry Dough

4-3/4 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 cups cold butter, plus 2
tablespoons, cut into 1/2" slices
1 egg, beaten
1 cup ice water
1/4 cup coarse sugar
1/4 cup whole milk

Directions - Almond Filling:

1. Start by blanching the almonds. Boil 1 cup of water. Place the almonds in a medium bowl. Once the water is boiling, pour the boiling water into the bowl, just covering the almonds. Soak the almonds for 1 minute, then strain the almonds through a colander and rinse with cold water until the almonds are cool. Pour almonds onto a paper towel-lined plate and pat dry. Remove the almond skins by pinching one end of the almond (the nut should slip out of the skin easily). Remove and discard all of the almond skins. Let the almonds dry. (If you want to skip this step, substitute the same quantity of almond flour/meal.)
2. Place the blanched and dried almonds in a food processor. Cover, and process the almonds until smooth. Add the confectioners' sugar, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg and blend until combined. Add the egg whites and almond extract, and process until smooth. Transfer to a small bowl and stir the granulated sugar and brown sugar in with the almond mixture until combined.
3. Remove the almond paste from the food processor, scraping the sides. Wrap the paste in plastic wrap and refrigerate until ready to use.

Directions - Pastry Dough

1. In a large mixing bowl, mix together the flour and salt. Add the butter slices to the flour and toss to ensure the butter pieces are coated and not sticking together.
2. In a small mixing bowl, use a fork to combine the egg and ice water. Pour the egg mixture into the flour mixture and use a wooden spoon to combine. The flour will still be somewhat dry and the butter will retain its shape.
3. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead the dough to form a ball. Repeat this about 5 times. Once kneaded, form the dough into a rectangle.
4. Using a lightly floured rolling pin, roll the dough into a 15 x 10-inch rectangle. Fold the two shorter sides into the center of the rectangle to meet each other and then fold the rectangle at the center crease, creating 4 layers.
5. Roll out and fold the dough again in the same way. Then wrap the dough in plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator for 20 minutes. Once chilled, repeat the same rolling and folding steps 2 more times. Chill again for another 20 minutes until ready to prepare the letters.
6. Use a knife to cut the dough into 4 equal pieces. Wrap 3 of the pieces in plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator. Roll the remaining piece onto a lightly floured surface to form a 12 x 10-inch rectangle. Use a sharp knife to cut the rectangle of dough into 4 equal 2.5 x 12-inch rectangles.
7. Form the almond filling into a rope approximately 11" long and 1/2" thick and place it along the center of a strip of dough. Roll the strip lengthwise and use a pastry brush to brush the edges with milk. Pinch the edges to seal, leaving the ends open. On an ungreased baking sheet, place the strip seam side down and shape it into an "S." Use a pastry brush to lightly brush the top with milk and sprinkle with the coarse sugar.
8. Repeat this process until all of the letters have been prepared.
9. Place letters seam side down on ungreased baking sheets. Bake in a preheated oven at 375°F for 25 minutes or until letters are golden. Remove from the oven and cool on cooling racks.