

FOOD & DINING

Vanilla cookies for your Valentine's sweetheart



Traditional Valentine's Day gifts include jewelry, flowers and, of course, confections. While Romeos might want to leave their Juliets' jewelry and floral arrangements to the professionals, those who want to personalize this year's Valentine's gifts can try whipping up a batch of cookies for their special someone.

The following recipe for "Biscotti Ripieni (Vanilla Cookies with Chocolate Buttercream Filling)" from Michael White's "Fiamma: The Essence of Contemporary Italian Cooking" (Wiley) checks all the boxes: It's a dessert, it's sweet and it includes chocolate. Those three things are sure to delight any sweetheart with a sweet tooth this Valentine's Day.

Biscotti Ripieni (Vanilla Cookies with Chocolate Buttercream Filling)
Makes about 18 filled cookies

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 6 ounces (11/2 sticks) unsalted butter
- 1 large egg
- Grated zest of 1 navel orange
- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt

Buttercream

- 1 large white egg
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small cubes and softened
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

- 1/2 cup bittersweet chocolate, chopped into small pieces

Preheat the oven to 325 F. Line a cookie sheet with parchment.

In a mixing bowl, cream the sugar and butter together until smooth. Stir in the egg and orange zest, then add the flour and salt, and stir together until smooth. You can also do this with an electric mixer, if desired. Transfer the dough to a pastry bag fitted with a medium-size plain tip, about 1/2-inch wide, and pipe thin strips about 2 inches long onto the pan, leaving about 2 inches between each strip. Bake in the lower one-third of the oven until lightly browned on the edges, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove with a spatula to a rack and let cool.

Meanwhile, prepare the buttercream:

Combine the egg white and sugar in the top of a double boiler or a metal bowl that fits over a pan of simmering water. The bottom should not touch the water. Heat until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture is slightly thickened, whisking continuously.

Immediately remove the bowl from the water and begin beating the mixture with a hand-held electric mixer. Continue beating while slowly adding the butter. Beat until the mixture is room temperature and thickened, about the consistency of a thick confectioners' sugar-butter frosting, 10 to 15 minutes. About halfway through, the buttercream will look ugly. Keep beating; it will

become smooth and thick. Beat in the vanilla. Cover and refrigerate for 10 to 20 minutes.

To assemble, place half the cookies upside down (flat side up) on a sheet pan and spread each with a thin layer of buttercream.

Top with the remaining cookies and refrigerate the tray until the buttercream sets, 10 to 15 minutes.

While the cookies are in the refrigerator, melt the chocolate in the top of a double boiler set over simmering water, stirring until smooth. Remove the inset and cool the chocolate to room temperature. Remove the cookies from the refrigerator. Holding each cookie by one end, dip half of it in the melted chocolate. Set it on a waxed paper- or parchment-lined tray. When all of the cookies are dipped, return them to the refrigerator for a few minutes to set.

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