

Melomakarona



These delicately spiced semolina biscuits are a Christmas staple in many Greek households. Hot from the oven, the

thirsty biscuits soak up an aromatic honey syrup resulting in a soft crumb that showcases the flavours of honey. Often made in large batches, they are delicious when fresh and keep well for several weeks, if they last that long, and so make an ideal gift. The biscuits are both dairy and egg free and are traditionally topped with chopped walnuts. This version also has a walnut filling, and you can decorate with chocolate if you like.

Tip: Make the syrup in advance so that it cools before you make the biscuits.

Total time: 2 hours plus cooling

Cooking: 25 minutes

Makes 38

Syrup

200g Sugar
300ml Water
2 Cinnamon sticks
4 Cloves
1 Orange
300g Honey

Filling and Decoration

150g Walnuts
1 tsp Cinnamon
1/4 tsp Cloves, ground
100g Milk chocolate (optional)
100g Dark chocolate, 70% cocoa (optional)
10ml (2 tsp) Light olive oil (optional)

Biscuits

500g Plain flour
150g Fine semolina
100g Sugar
1 tsp Baking powder
½ tsp Bicarbonate of soda
2 tsp Cinnamon
1 tsp Nutmeg, ground
½ tsp Cloves, ground
½ tsp Salt
75ml Brandy/Cognac (or sherry) (optional)
2 Oranges
225ml Light or mild olive oil

Melomakarona method

1. For the syrup, add the sugar, water, spices, and strips of orange peel (use a vegetable peeler) to a shallow wide pan. Bring to the boil and then simmer for 5 minutes. Turn the heat off and stir in the honey after about 10 minutes, when the syrup has cooled slightly. Leave to cool completely.
2. Preheat the oven to 180°C fan (200°C) and line 2-3 trays with parchment paper.
3. For the filling, finely chop the walnuts and mix together with cinnamon and cloves.
4. Combine the rest of dry ingredients in a large bowl: flour, semolina, sugar, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda, salt and spices.
5. In another bowl, combine the brandy, olive oil, zest of 2 oranges and 50ml of orange juice.
6. Add the wet ingredients into the dry flour mixture and mix briefly to form a smooth and soft oily dough. If the dough cracks easily when you roll and flatten (see below) add more oil, a tablespoon at a time.
7. Weigh out 30g of mixture (about one dessertspoon), roll into balls and flatten between your palms to make a 7cm disc. Spoon 1 level teaspoon of the chopped walnuts into the middle and encase in the dough by pinching the sides and ends together and compressing in your hands to make a long oval (egg) shape. Arrange the ovals on baking sheets, leaving at least 3cm between biscuits to allow even cooking. Press a fork into the top of the biscuits to create dimples or lines.
8. Bake for 20-25 minutes until lightly golden brown.
9. Plunge the hot biscuits into the syrup in batches of 3 or 4 for 10-20 seconds so the syrup soaks through to the centre, flipping over halfway. Don't leave the biscuits in the syrup too long or they may break apart.
10. Return the biscuits to the baking trays and leave to cool completely.
11. Before serving decorate the tops with a drizzle of the remaining syrup or honey and the remaining chopped nuts. If using chocolate, melt the chocolate and olive oil together gently (in a dish placed above a pan of simmering water) and drizzle over, dip, or coat the biscuits before decorating with nuts and leaving to set.

Honey and Earl Gray Tea Bread



Halfway between a tea loaf and soda bread, this anytime treat suits a chilly April morning or a warm spring afternoon. Aside from soaking the fruit overnight, you can throw this together in a matter of minutes and the loaf will keep well for several days. It's also excellent toasted and spread liberally with butter. Earl Grey tea lends a citrusy note, but you can use your usual favourite tea, just be sure to make a strong tea liquor. If you're not using Earl Grey tea, adding the zest of half a lemon or orange tastes great too, though too much will overpower the delicate tea and honey flavours.

Makes 10-12 servings

Hands on time: 20 minutes

Total time: 1 hour 40mins + overnight soaking

Ingredients

550ml	Strong Earl Gray Tea
400g	Dried fruit (Sultanas, Raisins, Currants, Chopped Apricots etc.)
2	Eggs, beaten
150g + 2tbsp	Honey
450g	Wholemeal spelt (or wheat) flour
1.5tsp	Bicarbonate of soda

Method

1. Make a strong tea liquor using 600ml of boiling water and 4 Earl Gray tea bags or 4 teaspoons of loose tea. The liquid volume will reduce by about 50ml after removing the teabags or leaves.
2. Soak the fruit overnight in the tea.
3. Preheat oven to 190°C or 170°C Fan and line a 2lb loaf tin (approx. 10x20cm).
4. In a large bowl, stir the honey and eggs into the soaked fruit.
5. Sift together the flour and bicarbonate of soda and add to the fruit mixture. Quickly fold everything together until no patches of flour remain and then scrape the mixture into the prepared tin and level the top.
6. Bake for between 75 and 80 minutes in total, or until a skewer comes out free of any uncooked batter. After 45 minutes, cover the top of the loaf with foil to prevent burning. When the loaf is almost cooked, brush the top generously with 2 tablespoons of runny or slightly warmed honey, returning to the oven (uncovered) for the final 5-10 minutes of cooking.
7. Leave to cool in the tin before slicing and serving plain or spread with butter.

Coconut crumbles



Tip: If you plan to bake the mixture right away, chop the nuts and cherries a little. This will help the biscuits to hold their shape.

Time: Preparation 15 mins + cooking 15mins

Makes 12-14

150g Desiccated coconut
100g Plain flour
50g Rolled oats
½ tsp Cinnamon
100g Glace cherries
100g Pistachios
40g Sunflower seeds
Pinch Salt
100g Butter
150g Honey
50g Dark chocolate (optional)

1. If you want to bake the biscuits right away, preheat your oven to 200°C (180°C Fan) and line 1-2 baking sheets with parchment.
2. Gently melt the butter in a pan and then stir in the honey.
3. Combine the rest of the ingredients (except chocolate) with the butter and honey and mix until everything is coated and combined.
4. Scoop large dessert spoonfuls of mixture on to the prepared trays, pressing and flattening the mixture slightly. Alternatively, tip everything onto a large piece of baking parchment paper and gather and compress the mixture until you form a tight cylinder about 5-6 cm diameter and 12-15cm long. Twist the parchment around the ends to seal everything in and then chill for at least 1 hour before slicing into 1cm rounds.
5. Bake the biscuits in a pre-heated oven for 12-15 minutes until lightly golden brown. Allow to cool before moving from the trays.
6. Decorate with melted chocolate and extra coconut or cherries, if desired.

Dark cocoa and almond chocolates

These intense chocolates are made with a base of coconut oil and toasted almonds. Light use of honey means they are not overly sweet and they lend themselves to various flavour additions. Photographed are my coconut, whole nut, and cocoa-cinnamon dusted orange truffles. Adding sesame seeds, dried sour cherries, coffee powder, or peppermint extract also works well so raid your kitchen cupboards and be creative! A perfect gift for loved ones this Valentine's Day.

Makes about 60 chocolates

Hands on time: 25 minutes

Total time: 35minutes + overnight cooling

Ingredients

75g	Whole almonds
150g	Coconut oil
125g	Honey
100g	Dark chocolate (70% cocoa)
50g + 2tsp	Cocoa, sieved
Pinch	Salt
60g	Desiccated coconut
1	Orange
1 tsp	Cinnamon
100g	Whole nuts



Tip: The chocolates need to set overnight so make them ahead of time

Method

1. Toast the whole almonds until lightly brown, this is best achieved in a medium oven for about 5-8 minutes (180°C or 160°C Fan). Once slightly cooled, grind the nuts to a fine powder using a mini chopper or pestle and mortar.
2. Line 3 small dishes or containers with baking parchment (approx. 15x8cm, I used standard takeaway boxes).
3. Melt the coconut oil in a pan over medium heat. Add the honey, stirring carefully, and heat on a medium-high heat until it just begins to bubble. Remove from the heat and cool briefly before stirring in the dark chocolate until melted and you have a smooth mixture.
4. Add a pinch of salt, cocoa powder, and the ground toasted almonds to the mixture and stir until smooth.
5. Pour one third of the mixture into a clean bowl and add stir in most of the coconut. Scrape the mixture into one of the lined containers, level out, and top with the remaining coconut.
6. Pour half of the remaining chocolate mixture into a second lined container and scatter the whole nuts over the surface.
7. Add the zest of one orange to the remaining chocolate mixture before pouring into the final lined container and placing all three boxes in the fridge to set overnight.
8. Use a sharp knife to cut the chocolates, dividing each block into about 20 pieces.

9. Toss the orange flavoured chocolates in a mixture of cocoa (2tsp) and cinnamon (1tsp).
10. The chocolates don't need to be stored in the fridge and will last for several weeks.

Draft recipe: Quick honey and rye banana bread/ muffins

A no-fuss way to use up a large bunch of neglected bananas...

- 180g Wholemeal rye flour
- 2tsp Baking powder
- 1.5tsp Bicarbonate of soda
- ½tsp Salt
- 125ml Melted butter (or sunflower/peanut oil) [Don't use rape seed oil]
- 150g Honey
- 3 Eggs, medium
- 5-6 Bananas, ripe (400g weighed without skins, mashed + one more for the top)
- 125g Pecans/walnuts, chopped (or other nuts)
- 75g Prunes, soft, chopped (or other soft dry fruit) (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 200oC fan (220oC)
2. Line a 2lb loaf tin with parchment (or 2 x 1lb tins and adjust cooking time) or line muffin tray
3. Sift together the flour, salt, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda.
4. Briefly beat the butter/oil and honey before adding the eggs and mashed bananas
5. Add in the flour in thirds, folding to remove any pockets of flour before folding the nuts/dried fruit and scraping into the prepared tin
6. Slice the final banana in half lengthways, laying it cut sides upwards on the top of the mixture (or if making muffins top with a slice of banana)
7. Turn the oven down to 170oC Fan and bake for 55-60minutes, adding foil after 40 minutes if the top is browning. If muffins, bake for 20 minutes or until cooked through.

Draft recipe: Olive oil, almond and fresh fruit cake

An excellent store cupboard cake in which you can use fresh or frozen fruit. Frozen mixed berries work well or diced apple or a mixture of whatever you have. Light olive oil won't overpower the fruit or honey flavours here but using extra virgin oil can give a wonderful depth of flavour to the sponge – use whatever you prefer. If you're using red berries in the cake hold back a few to make a lovely pink icing to drizzle over the cake once it's cooled.

150ml Olive oil (your choice of regular or extra virgin)
150g Honey
4 Eggs, medium (3 large)
200g Ground almonds
100g Polenta (the type that is like fine sand and not powder)
½ tsp Bicarbonate of soda
1tsp Baking powder
Pinch Salt
1 Lemon, zested
300g Fresh or frozen fruit
25g Flaked almonds (for the top)
50g Icing sugar (optional)

1. Line 20cm square tin with parchment
2. Preheat oven to 160oC fan (180oC)
3. Whisk (using a stand mixer or electric whisk if you have one) the oil, honey and eggs for 5 minutes until the mixture becomes frothy
4. In a separate bowl, combine the dry ingredients and lemon zest and then fold this into the wet mixture.
5. Fold about $\frac{3}{4}$ of your chosen fruit through the mixture and scrape into prepared tin, topping the batter with the remaining fruit pieces and some flaked almonds
6. Bake for about 1 hour-1hour 15 (the time will depend on the moisture content of fruits used), covering the top with foil if it starts to get too brown towards the end of cooking time until a skewer comes out clean of any cake batter.
7. Mix the icing sugar with a few drops of lemon juice or with the juice from any berries (if using). Drizzle over the cooling cake.

Draft recipe: 'Low sugar' carrot and almond honey cake

A not-too sweet, sandwich cake made without refined sugar. Fill/top with whipped cream or cream cheese lightly sweetened with a drizzle of honey. Flaked almonds mixed through the batter give a lovely crunchy texture. Top one sponge with extra almonds if you don't plan to ice the top of the sandwich cake.

- 100g Flaked almonds
- 200g Self-raising wholemeal flour
- 100g Honey
- 1tsp Cinnamon
- 1tsp Mixed spice
- 2tsp Baking powder
- 2 Bananas, large (3 small) about 180g peeled weight, mashed
- 1 Apple, eating type, grated
- 200g Carrot, grated
- 3 Eggs, medium, beaten
- 3tbsp Oil, olive or flavourless
- 100g Sultanas
- 1 Orange, zested

1. Line 2x 20cm circular tins
2. Preheat oven to 180oC fan
3. Combine everything, divide into 2 tins and bake for 40-50 mins