



RECIPE OF THE WEEK: 13/12/2022

Melomakarouna or Finikia (Honey Cookies)

Melomakarouna which are also called finikia are small cookies soaked in honey. They are traditionally cooked around Christmas and New Year. Some historians say that the Phoenicians brought the recipe to Greece in the 14th century. An explanation of why it is called finikia - which means dates in Greek - is that the appearance of the imprinted surface of the cookies resembles the lines on the skins of finikia.

Flour is used to prepare them although some people use semolina or a mixture of both. Once baked, they are immersed in honey syrup for a few seconds and sprinkled with ground cinnamon and coarsely chopped walnuts.

Ingredients (Serves 30-35 cookies)

For the syrup

300g Greek thyme-honey
300g sugar
400 ml water
1 stick cinnamon
3-4 cloves
1 orange peel

For the dough

280g light olive oil
280g sunflower oil or 225g unsalted butter
150g sugar
zest and juice of 2 oranges
80ml brandy
2 level tsp ground cinnamon
1 level tsp ground cloves
¼ tsp nutmeg
1 kg plain flour
a pinch of salt
2 level tsp baking powder
1 level tsp baking soda

For sprinkling

2-3 tbsp ground cinnamon
50g-60g coarsely ground walnuts



Method

1. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas 4.
2. Make the syrup by heating all the syrup ingredients (except the honey) in a casserole on a medium heat to boiling point. Turn the heat down and simmer for 3 minutes. Stir in the honey discarding any foam forming on the surface. Allow the syrup to cool.
3. Beat the olive oil and sunflower oil - or butter if using - with sugar in a mixer for 2-3 minutes. Alternatively, whisk by hand for 5-6 minutes. Add the zest of the oranges, brandy, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg and mix well. Dissolve the baking soda in the orange juice and stir into the mixture.
4. Sift the flour, salt and baking powder and gradually add this to the wet mixture.
5. Work the melomakarouna mixture with your hands for 1-2 minutes until it is soft and malleable. Add more flour if it is too sticky and soft or more oil if it is too dense. Do not over-knead the dough to ensure it results in light and fluffy melomakarouna.
6. Take a small amount of the dough, 30g in weight and mould it into an oval shape, the size of a walnut, 3-4 cm diameter. Press the dough lightly with your fingers to flatten it slightly. Repeat the process until all the dough is used up. Using the back of a fork or grater, score the surface of the dough pieces to form a criss-cross pattern. This helps to absorb the syrup.
7. Place the dough pieces onto un-greased baking trays and leave 2cm spaces between them so that they do not stick together during baking.
8. Bake in the pre-heated oven on the middle shelves for 20-25 minutes until they become crunchy and turn golden-brown.
9. Take them out and let them cool for a few minutes until they slightly harden. Immerse them in the syrup 3 or 4 at a time for 20 seconds on each side.
10. Take them out with a slotted spoon and place them on large platters. Sprinkle them with cinnamon and chopped walnuts.

Note

1. They can be preserved for a few days and the taste and flavours improve over time. They keep for longer if kept in airtight containers.
2. You can replace the flour with oats in order to make them gluten free.
3. For extra crunchiness, you may insert one whole walnut into the middle of the dough before baking.