

Nougatine

I love these lacy, hole filled biscuits. They are delicate and brittle and melt in the mouth. It is the sort of recipe that produces a result that some home cooks feel is perhaps beyond them. In other words, if you ate these in a smart restaurant, you might think they are frightfully difficult to make, but in fact they are really easy. We all need recipes like this in our arsenal. Something a little bit clever and glamorous but actually an easy dream to make.

I generally serve the biscuits as flat thins, but with care the slightly cooled cooked mixture can be moulded over up-turned cups or glasses to create lovely receptacles for mousses, ices and so on. Equally you can wrap the cooked but still malleable dough around wooden spoons to create a little biscuit tube or what might previously have been known as a cigarette russe. Draping the cooked dough over a rolling pin or bottle will yield the classic tuile biscuit shape. All in all there is scope here for creativity in terms of the possible shapes you might wish to achieve.

The cooked biscuits keep perfectly for several days stored in an air-tight container. The uncooked mixture is quite safe once refrigerated for up to a month and behaves perfectly when cooked at a later time. I serve them with ice creams, sorbets, granitas, mousses and soufflés and anything to do with chocolate.

During the summer I will deliver a plate of them alongside a platter of figs or a bowl of peaches. When the pears start to ripen later on in the autumn, I will serve them with those and a wedge of mature Coolea cheese from west Cork.

The apple pectin may be a new ingredient to some cooks but this is easily found nowadays in health food shops or you can make your own as in the recipe on page ***. Glucose syrup has also become widely available as the continuing obsession with celebration cakes of gargantuan proportion and multiple shades, hues and flavours continues unabated.

175g nuts, a mixture, or the entire quantity of a single nut such as pistachios, almonds, walnuts, pecan nuts and Brazil nuts.

Hazelnuts may also be used but should be roasted and peeled before chopping

150g caster or granulated sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon apple pectin

125g butter

50g glucose syrup

2 teaspoons water

Preheat the oven to 190c

Chop the nuts in a food processor using the pulse button to render them to a semi-coarse texture. It is important you do not render the nuts to a powder and equally if the texture is too coarse, the mixture does not knit together so well. So think grit rather than gravel.

In a small saucepan, combine the remaining ingredients, and cook on a very low heat just until the mixture is melted and smooth.
Add the nuts and stir to mix.

Using a silicone baking mat or an oven tray lined with parchment paper, drop on scant teaspoons of the mixture allowing plenty of room for the mixture to spread as it cooks. A standard oven tray, c 40cm x 35cm, will accommodate about 4 biscuits this size. You can of course make smaller biscuits by reducing the amount of mixture.

Cook for about 10 minutes or until the biscuits have spread into lacy and lightly caramelised flat crisps. They will be the colour of toasted hazelnuts.

The cooked biscuits will be soft and molten when removing from the oven so allow the biscuits to cool until set on the cooking tray before removing to a wire rack to cool completely.

Any remaining uncooked mixture will store perfectly in the fridge for up to one month. It will solidify but you simply prise off bits and cook as above.