

Almond Shortbread

Kurabyes

A profusion of almond confection with origins from Moorish Spain have become an intrinsic part of our everyday sweet offerings. *Kurabyes*, derived from *ghriba* (*ghouyeba*), are irresistible crisp shortbread cookies with toasted ground almonds, a hint of ouzo, fragrant with orange blossom water and generously drenched in powdered sugar.

When the Sephardim in exile settled in Rhodes Island they continued to make these melt-in-the mouth treats very similar to Greek *kourabiedes*.

I have added an earthy dimension to my original traditional recipe with tahini paste and for that extra crunch toasted sesame seeds. I hope you enjoy this super easy to make addictive treat.

1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ cup confectioner's sugar, plus extra for dusting
1 tsp vanilla extract
½ cup sunflower oil
2 tbsp tahini paste
1 tbsp ouzo or brandy
1 cup blanched almonds, *lightly toasted and ground
3 cups all-purpose flour
¼ cup cornstarch
¼ tsp baking powder
a pinch of salt
1 tbsp sesame seeds, toasted

For shaping:

1 tsp orange blossom water diluted in 1 cup water

For topping:

20 blanched slivered almonds or pistachios

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Line 2 baking trays with baking paper.

Beat the butter on medium speed in the bowl of an electric mixer for about 8 minutes, until pale and creamy. Gradually add the confectioner's sugar and vanilla extract and beat for 2 minutes. Beat in the oil and tahini paste and ouzo or brandy.

Stir in the ground almonds, the sifted combined flours, baking powder and sesame seeds, gradually working in lightly with your hands until a very soft dough forms. Be careful not to overwork it.

Pinch off about 20 pieces of dough. Moisten your hands with diluted orange blossom water and shape into balls. Squeezing with both forefingers and thumbs shape into triangles about 1½in wide and ½in in height. Arrange on the prepared baking trays leaving some space between them as they spread while baking. Press in slivered almond or pistachio in the center of each biscuit.

Bake for about 20 minutes or until they are just beginning to color. They should be pale, slightly cracked on the top and barely golden around the edges. Do not overcook. Let cool on the baking trays for 5 minutes before removing with a metal spatula and set on wire racks. To serve, dust generously with confectioner's sugar and stack on a platter.

Stella's Hints:

- ❖ *Grind the toasted almonds finely but not to a powder – they should be like sand with coarser bits giving the biscuit more crunch.
- ❖ They will keep for up to 2 weeks in an airtight container in a cool dry place.

