

Marzipan Filled Pastries

Gizadas de masapan

Gizadas de masapan are marzipan filled baked star-shaped tartlets similar in taste to macaroons. These delicately handcrafted sweet treats are the crown of our Sephardic confection dating back to medieval Spain – a recipe we inherited centuries ago.

They are sublime for any celebration and wonderful finale to a dinner party as petit fours or served with tea or a strong cup of Turkish coffee.

For the filling:

500g (1lb 2oz) blanched almonds

3 cups warm water

1 3/4 cups sugar

3 egg whites

For the pastry:

1 1/2 cups sifted cake flour

2 egg yolks

1 whole egg

2 tsp vegetable oil

3 tbsp water

For decorating:

silver balls (dragées)

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). Line 2 baking trays with baking paper.

Make the marzipan: Grind the almonds, a small batch at a time, in a food processor, until quite finely ground with some texture not too fine. Pulse, using the on-off action, to control that it does not grind to an oily paste. Put the warm water and sugar into a large heavy-based stainless-steel pan over a low heat. To avoid crystallisation, ensure that the sugar is completely dissolved before the syrup comes to a boil. Bring the syrup to a boil over a high heat, without stirring. As the sugar becomes more concentrated the syrup will feel tacky and a short thread, about 1.5cm (1/2in) in length, will form between your wetted finger and thumb when they are pulled apart. This takes about 15-20 minutes.

Remove the pan from the heat and add the ground almonds, stirring vigorously with a wooden spoon. Return to a low heat and continue stirring constantly for about 12 minutes or until the paste comes away from the sides of the pan. Be sure to stir continuously so that the mixture does not stick to the bottom of the pan and does not scorch. To test if the marzipan is ready roll a small amount of the mixture, the size of a small marble, between your palms. If it stays in a

ball and does not stick to your hands remove from the heat. Allow to cool first. Whisk the egg whites in a clean bowl until soft peaks form and then gradually fold into the almond mixture, a little at a time, with a metal spoon.

Make the pastry: Combine the pastry ingredients together in a large bowl to make a firm dough and knead lightly. Working with small pieces of pastry at a time, roll the pastry very thinly on a lightly floured work surface. Keep the remaining dough covered with plastic wrap until required. Cut circles out of the rolled pastry using a 5cm (2in) biscuit cutter.

Place a teaspoonful of the filling in the centre of each circle. Carefully work around the edges of the pastry circle, using your thumb and forefinger of both hands. Pinch upright pleats to make a six-sided star around the almond filling. This takes some practice but you will soon become adept at pinching!

Arrange on prepared baking trays and place a silver ball in the centre of each filled pastry. Bake for 20-25 minutes, until lightly golden. Leave to cool on wire racks.

Stella's Hints:

- * I enlist the help of an extra pair of hands to alternate between holding the pan steady and energetically stirring the marzipan over the warm stove.
- * Instead of rolling the dough I use a pasta machine and feed it through until I achieve the desired thickness.
- * For an easier method, press circles of pastry to fit tiny tartlet moulds. Fill the centre with the almond filling, pop a silver ball in the centre and bake as above.
- * To store the pastries: Interleave the *gizadas* between layers of baking paper and store in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.