

Desserts of the World: Germany

Presented November 19, 2019, by Terri Fleming

Lebkuchen are the Christmas cookie of Nuremberg, Germany. They date back to at least the 1300s, when the monks in Nuremberg first started baking them. In the middle ages, as merchants traveled inland from Venice and Genoa, Nuremberg was one of the central hubs of the continental spice trade. That gave the bakers of Nuremberg better access to exotic spices. Nuremberg was also surrounded by a dense forest was famous for its honeybees. Even with access to the ingredients, Lebkuchen were a luxury. Spices and citrus were rarities, making them incredibly expensive. They would have been saved for special occasions.



Traditional Lebkuchen

Makes about 35. Source: thedaringgourmet.com

Ingredients

¼ cup all-purpose flour
4 ounces candied lemon peel
4 ounces candied orange peel
5 large eggs
1¼ cup packed brown sugar
¼ cup honey
1 teaspoon quality pure vanilla extract
2 cups almond meal
2 cups hazelnut meal
¼ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon baking powder
3 teaspoons Lebkuchengewürz (recipe below)
Backoblaten (wafers) (70mm available on Amazon)

Chocolate glaze:

3 ounces quality dark or milk chocolate
1 teaspoon coconut oil or oil of choice (do not use butter)

White sugar glaze:

½ cup granulated sugar
¼ cup water (or citrus water from candied peel recipe, below)
½ teaspoon vanilla
1 to 2 Tablespoons rum (or liqueur) (optional)
½ cup powdered sugar

For decoration:

Blanched whole almonds cut in half lengthwise (optional)

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Line 2 cookie sheets with parchment.
2. Toss the candied lemon and orange peel with ¼ cup of all-purpose flour to keep it from sticking together and then pulse in a food processor until finely minced. Set aside.
3. In a large mixing bowl, beat the eggs until foamy. Add the sugar, honey and vanilla, and beat until combined.
4. Add the almond and hazelnut meals, salt, baking powder, Lebkuchengewürz and candied lemon and orange peels and stir vigorously until thoroughly combined. (Or beat for 2 minutes with a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment.) The mixture will be wet. If it is too thin to scoop onto the Backoblaten, add some more almond or hazelnut meal.
5. Arrange the Backoblaten on a lined cookie sheet about 1 inch apart. Scoop the dough onto each Backoblaten, smoothing down the top and pushing the dough to the edges of the wafer.
6. Bake on the middle rack of the oven for 25-28 minutes (use time to make glazes, below).
7. When done, move to wire racks. Glaze half the cookies with white glaze while the cookies are still warm. Glaze with chocolate when cookies have cooled completely.
8. Make glazes:

- a. White glaze: Place the granulated sugar and water in a small saucepan on the stove. Bring to a boil and boil for a few minutes. Add the vanilla and 1 to 2 tablespoons rum or liqueur, if using. Sift powdered sugar over the hot sugar syrup and stir. Add additional water as needed to make a thin glaze. Use pastry brush to spread white glaze over warm cookies.
 - b. Chocolate glaze: Place chocolate and oil in a small bowl and microwave stirring occasionally, until melted. Use immediately. If glaze becomes firm, reheat in the microwave. Dip cookies or spoon over.
9. If desired, arrange 3 blanched almond halves on each Lebkuchen while the glaze is still wet. Let the Lebkuchen dry completely until the glaze is hardened.
 10. Keep stored in an airtight container. Will keep for several weeks, and the flavor improves with time.

Authentic Lebkuchengewürz (German gingerbread spice blend)

Ingredients

2½ Tablespoons ground cinnamon	½ teaspoon ground ginger
2 teaspoon ground cloves	½ teaspoon ground star anise
½ teaspoon ground allspice	¼ teaspoon ground mace
½ teaspoon ground coriander	¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
½ teaspoon ground green cardamom	

Directions

1. Combine the spices together and store in an airtight jar in a cool, dark place for up to one year.
2. For superior flavor results, grind these spices from toasted and freshly ground whole spices. To toast, simply heat a dry skillet over medium heat and toast the spices until very fragrant, being careful not to scorch the spices or they will become bitter. Using the freshly ground blend within a few days is optimal.

Homemade Candied Citrus Peel

Source: altonbrown.com

Ingredients

- 4 ripe oranges or lemons
- 2 cups sugar

Directions

1. Place a cooling rack over parchment paper on the counter or over a pan.
2. Scrub the fruit clean with warm water and a small bit of dish soap. Rinse well.
3. Using a vegetable peeler, remove the outer peel of each fruit. Lay each peel on a cutting board, pith (white) side up. Use a paring knife to remove as much pith as possible. The more you get off, the less bitter the peel. (Alternative method: Use a zester to remove the peel in long curly pieces.)
4. Boil the peels in 2 cups of cold water over medium-high heat. Drop the heat to maintain a simmer for 15 minutes. Drain and discard the water. If using lemons, repeat this process. Oranges need just one boiling bath.
5. Return peels to the pan, add 2 cups of sugar and 2 cups of clean water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat and stir every few minutes until the sugar dissolves.
6. When the syrup boils, reduce heat and simmer for approximately 1 hour. Watch closely; as the water cooks away, you'll need to reduce the heat to keep it at a simmer. Stir frequently.
7. After 50 minutes, a majority of the water will have evaporated and the remaining syrup will be thick. Use an instant-read thermometer to start checking the temperature. When the syrup hits 250 degrees F, immediately remove from the heat and use a slotted spoon or tongs to place the peels on the cooling rack, separating and straightening the pieces as quickly as you can with a spatula or a couple of forks. Once cool, shake off any excess sugar.
8. Store the candied peel in a glass jar and store at room temperature for up to 3 months.

Note: Don't throw away the crusty orange sugar in the pan. Add 1 cup of water, cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Use the syrup in the place of water in the Lebkuchen sugar glaze recipe, or in beverages, like tea and cocktails.