

Cantucci di Prato (Almond Cookies From Prato)

Prato, Italy is famous for their Cantucci (small biscotti). They are meant to be dipped into a glass of Vin Santo or Morellino wine from Elba or even a late harvest wine. Christmas isn't Christmas without them in our house!. If you are lucky enough to get some Cantucci at an Italian bakery in Tuscany, lucky you! The Vin Santo there is pretty good too! Just remember to stash some in your luggage because it's hard to come by here! I really recommend using baking parchment, it's a baker's best friend!

½ cup whole raw hazelnuts
2 cups unbleached flour
1 cup sugar
1 tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. baking soda
1/8 tsp. salt
½ cup whole raw almonds
3 tbsp. unsalted butter, room temperature
2 large eggs
1 large egg yolk
1 tsp. vanilla extract
2 tsp. freshly grated orange zest or clementine zest
Additional flour for work surface

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with baking parchment.

Spread the hazelnuts in a single layer in a shallow pan & place in the oven, stirring every now & again, until lightly toasted & the skins begin to blister 15-18 minutes. Remove from the oven & place onto a towel; roll up the towel enclosing the nuts & let cool for about 10 minutes. With the nuts still inside the towel, rub them together with your hands so that skins will loosen & come away (not all will, don't worry).

In a large mixing bowl, stir together the hazelnuts, flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, almonds & butter. In a separate bowl combine the eggs, egg yolk, vanilla & orange zest & lightly beat with a fork until blended.

Add the egg mixture to the flour mixture & beat with a hand-held mixer or use a stand mixer at medium speed until a granular dough forms. If using a hand-held mixer and it is struggling, beat the mixture only until it is a rough, shaggy mass, then knead it with flour dusted hands in the bowl until all the ingredients are well incorporated.)

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured board & knead for 1 minute. Divide the dough into 4 equal portions. Using the palms of your hands, roll each portion into a log about 12" long & 1" in diameter. Place the logs on a prepared baking sheet, spacing them about 2" apart. Using the palm of your hand, lightly flatten the top of each log until it is about ½" thick.

Bake the logs in the oven until golden brown, approximately 15-20 minutes. Remove from the oven & let cool on the baking sheet until they can be handled, about 10 minutes. Leave the oven on.

Transfer the logs to a cutting board & cut them crosswise, on the diagonal, into ½” wide slices. Place the slices, flat sides down, about half an inch apart, onto 2 baking parchment lined rimmed baking pans. Return to the oven & bake until lightly toasted & the edges are golden brown, approximately 10 minutes. Let cool completely on the baking sheets before removing.

Cantucci can be stored in a covered container at room temperature for up to 2 weeks. **Bring on the Vin Santo! Salute!**