



ANSON MILLS

Elisenlebkuchen (Elizabeth's Lebkuchen)

Yield

About 27 (3-inch) cookies

Time

About 1¼ hours of active time, plus drying time, overnight chilling time, cooling time, and time to allow the glaze to set

Baking Notes

Lebkuchen is all about spices. Do yourself and this recipe a favor and buy some new ones! We like the Spice House.

The flavor of ground hazelnuts contributes significantly to the magic that is *Elisenlebkuchen*. But those who love hazelnuts also know they are a nuisance to peel. Yet we urge you not to purchase whole blanched hazelnuts. The more any nutmeat is processed, the more quickly its oils grow rancid. Blanched hazelnuts age out faster than some other nuts, in our opinion. Or maybe it is simply that hazelnuts make fewer appearances in American baking than almonds, and the ones in grocery stores are thus likely to be old and stale. But SunOrganic Farm in California sells exquisitely fresh whole hazelnuts—and we provide easy directions for blanching them.

You will discover Kühle *Back Oblaten* to be the singular brand of these thin baking wafers available for purchase in the United States. Yet they can be fresh or they can be stale. Some we purchased from Amazon stuck together and had to be pried apart with the tip of a small sharp knife. We don't know who that particular vendor was, but we're thinking German Deli is probably a safer choice.

It can be a real test of patience to find good candied fruit in the U.S. Who really wants to bake with the jumbled-up mixed fruits stained with dyed cherries? The best you're going to do is www.nuts.com's candied citron and glazed orange peel, which comes in strips and isn't sticky or gooey. (But if the candied citrus you do procure is sticky and gooey, rinse off the measured amount and then dry it well on paper towels before use.)

Comporting with their age and tradition, many German Christmas cookies—in particular, the dark brooding varieties like *Lebkuchen*—use an ancient form of leavening called *Hirschhornsalz* that predates baking soda and powder. In the United States, it is known as baker's ammonia (short for ammonium carbonate). It smells ghastly, exactly like the smelling salts used to revive Victorian women who succumbed to the fainting couch. But it does good things in baked goods. Because baker's ammonia is not activated by liquid, but by heat, doughs made with it may be left to languish and ripen in the refrigerator without suffering any loss of oven bounce. Baker's ammonia reacts quickly and creates an even oven spread, particularly in low-moisture cookies. Cookies bake up crisp, with an open crumb, and stay crisp for long periods, making baker's

ammonia the ideal leavening for the sorts of German Christmas cookies meant to be stored for the season. The particular chemistry of baker's ammonia also affects the flavor of cookies that are heavy with spice, rendering them, in our opinion, more authentic. Its odor dissipates at temperatures above 140 degrees. King Arthur Flour sells baker's ammonia, as do other online vendors.

And finally, the chocolate, if that is your glaze of choice. You don't have to use *any*, mind you—*Lebkuchen* with sugar glaze are delightful, too, and much easier to make. But a crisp chocolate glaze really offers an exciting dimensionality to these cookies. And what can we tell you, guys, is that we love Valrhona. We love their baking lozenges (*fèves*) and any of their bittersweet chocolates in the 60 to 70 percent range (the percentage refers to the amount of chocolate liquor in any given formula), with our top prize going to Valrhona Illanka Baking, which is also Rose Levy Beranbaum's new favorite baking chocolate. Raw cocoa butter increases the fat in the dipping chocolate, making it a bit thinner and easier to use as a glaze. Caution: this stuff is frequently rancid. But we found nice, raw food-grade cocoa butter produced in the Caribbean on Amazon.

Equipment Mise en Place

For the cookies, you will need a digital kitchen scale, two heavy baking sheets, silicone baking mats or parchment paper, a heavy-bottomed large saucepan, a medium bowl, a small bowl, a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, a rubber spatula, a small icing spatula, a 2-inch ramekin or small drinking glass, a shallow container, a small icing spatula, and two wire racks.

For the sugar glaze, you will need a digital kitchen scale, a small bowl, and a whisk.

For the chocolate glaze, you will need a digital kitchen scale; a medium saucepan; a clean, dry heatproof bowl that sits snugly on top of the saucepan; and a digital instant-read thermometer.

Ingredients

for the cookies

6.5 ounces hazelnuts

1 ounce baking soda

4 ounces blanched whole almonds

4.6 ounces almond paste, pulled or sliced into pieces

1 ounce diced candied orange peel (see Baking Notes)

1 ounce diced candied citron

1.4 ounces Anson Mills Artisan Fine Cloth-Bolted White Lammas Cake Flour

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon ground cardamom

½ teaspoon ground anise

⅛ teaspoon ground cloves

¾ teaspoon fine sea salt

1 tablespoon dark rum

1 teaspoon baker's ammonia

4 ounces egg whites
5 ounces superfine sugar
1 box 70-mm Back Oblaten (baking wafers)

for the sugar glaze

3 ounces confectioners' sugar, sifted
1½ teaspoons juice from 1 lemon
2 teaspoons water
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
Sliced almonds, for garnish (optional)

for the chocolate glaze

1 pound high-quality bittersweet chocolate (60% to 70% cocoa solids), chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped or shaved cacao butter (optional)

Directions

- 1. Make the cookies:** Adjust the oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 350 degrees. Line a baking sheet with a silicone mat or parchment paper.
- 2.** Bring 1 quart of water to a boil in a heavy-bottomed large saucepan over high heat. Add the baking soda and the hazelnuts; expect the water to darken and boil energetically. Boil until a trial hazelnut rescued from the water with a fork and run under cold water releases its skin easily when rubbed between the fingers, 2 to 3 minutes. Drain the hazelnuts, rinse them under cold water, and rub off their skins. Dry the nuts on paper towels. Turn them onto the prepared baking sheet and roast until dry and very lightly browned, 10 to 12 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool completely.
- 3.** While the hazelnuts are cooling, turn the almonds into a food processor and process to a fine meal, about 30 seconds. Transfer them to a medium bowl. Turn the candied orange peel and citron into the food processor and pulse to tiny bits, about ten 2-second pulses. Add the minced candied citrus to the almond meal.
- 4.** Turn the cooled hazelnuts into the food processor and process to a fine meal, about 30 seconds. Add the almond paste and pulse until it is incorporated into the nuts, about ten 1-second pulses. Add this mixture to the almond and candied citrus mixture and stir to combine. Add the flour, cinnamon, cardamom, anise, cloves, and salt and rub the ingredients with your fingertips to fully incorporated. Set aside.
- 5.** In a small bowl, stir together the baker's ammonia and rum until the baker's ammonia dissolves. (If it doesn't fully dissolve, heat the mixture in a small saucepan over low heat, stirring constantly.) Set aside.
- 6.** Pour the egg whites into a clean stand mixer bowl. Fit the mixer with a clean whisk attachment and beat the whites on medium speed until they hold soft peaks, about 1½ minutes. With the machine running, stream in the superfine sugar and continue beating until the egg whites are thick and glossy with slightly drooping tips, about 4 minutes more. Remove the bowl

from the mixer and knock the meringue off the whisk attachment. Add the nut mixture to the meringue and fold with a rubber spatula until combined. Add the rum mixture and fold to incorporate. The dough will be soft and sticky. Turn it into a shallow container, cover, and refrigerate overnight.

7. The next morning, line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats. Remove the dough from the refrigerator; it will have become firmer but will still be a bit sticky. Portion the dough into 1-ounce pieces. With clean, dry hands, arrange as many baking wafers as you have dough pieces on the baking sheets, spacing the wafers about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch apart. Roll each piece of dough between the palms of your hands into a ball. Place a dough ball solidly in the center of each wafer paper. Wash and dry your hands.

8. Press a small icing spatula very lightly onto a dough ball, lift up the dough with its wafer, and bring them closer to you on the countertop. Dip the bottom of a 2-inch ramekin or small drinking glass in water, shake off the excess, and, using a twisting motion, press the ball of dough into a smooth disk that covers all but the very outer edge of the wafer paper; take care not to wet the wafer. Smooth the surface of the dough with the spatula, slide the spatula off the dough to free it (instead of lifting it off), and return the cookie to the baking sheet. (Alternatively, moisten your fingers lightly with water and flatten the balls, and then use a small icing spatula dipped in water to smooth and spread the dough to just shy of the edges of the wafer.) Let the cookies stand at room temperature until the tops are dry to the touch, about 2 hours.

9. Adjust an oven rack to the lower-middle position and heat the oven to 325 degrees.

10. Bake the cookies one baking sheet at a time until the surfaces are no longer shiny and the edges are lightly brown, 12 to 14 minutes. Let cool on the baking sheet for 5 minutes, and then transfer the cookies to wire racks. Let cool completely.

11. *Make and apply the sugar glaze:* In a small bowl, whisk the confectioners' sugar, lemon juice, water, and vanilla to form a thin, runny glaze. Holding a cookie over the bowl, spoon glaze onto the cookie's surface, allowing the excess to drip back into the bowl. (Don't glaze the bottom.) Return the cookie to the wire rack; you may arrange 3 sliced almonds on top for garnish. Let the glaze dry completely. Store the cookies in an airtight container between sheets of waxed or parchment paper. They will keep for up to 1 month.

Make and apply the chocolate glaze: Heat 1 to 2 inches of water in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Meanwhile, weigh out 12 ounces of the chopped chocolate into a clean, dry heatproof bowl that sits snugly on top of the saucepan. Finely chop the remaining 4 ounces of chocolate and set it aside. When the water reaches a bare simmer, no hotter, remove the pan from the heat and set the bowl with the larger amount of chocolate on top; the water should not make any contact with bottom of the bowl. Melt the chocolate, stirring it regularly with a clean, dry spoon, until it registers 114 to 118 degrees on a digital instant-read thermometer. To protect the chocolate from overheating, it is best to remove the bowl from the saucepan before all of the chocolate has melted and to melt the remaining bits with the residual heat while stirring. When

the chocolate has melted, begin adding the finely chopped chocolate by the handful, stirring to melt each addition and returning the bowl briefly to the saucepan, if necessary, to maintain a temperature between 88 and 90 degrees all the while. Stir in the cacao butter (if using). The final tempered chocolate should rest between 88 and 89 degrees. Without delay, glaze the cookies one at a time by spooning chocolate over the top and allowing the excess to drip back into the bowl. (Don't glaze the bottom.) Return the cookie to the wire rack. (If the glaze becomes thick around the sides of the bowl or if its temperature drops during the decorating process, return the bowl to the saucepan to bring the chocolate back up to the correct temperature.) Let the glaze set completely on the cookies. Store the cookies in an airtight container between sheets of waxed or parchment paper. They will keep for up to 1 month.