



Elisenlebkuchen

Lebkuchen is a German word for gingerbread, but by far not the only one: It is also known as honigkuchen (honeycake), gewürzkuchen (spicecake), and pfefferkuchen (peppercake). The names always refer to its ingredients: either to honey as a sweetener or to the Oriental spices.

The first flat breads made with honey and spices were eaten in ancient Egypt, where honeybread was among the 4000-year-old grave goods found in pharaonic tombs. The ancient Greek and Romans presented honeycakes to the altars of their gods as an offering.

Honeybread crossed the Alps with the Romans. In the Middle Ages, the bread was renamed lebkuchen, which is borrowed from the Germanic "laib" meaning loaf, as in a loaf of bread. Lebkuchen was thought to be healthy and appetizing. Since it could be eaten on fasting days, monasteries, in particular, soon developed into centers for lebkuchen production. As a rule, monastery kitchens also housed the bakery where the sacramental, unleavened host wafers were baked, and it was here that the idea originated of placing the lebkuchen dough on such a wafer for baking. This way, the dough wouldn't get stuck to the baking sheet and not dry out too quickly.

This is a recipe from the early 1800s from the region of Nuremberg. It was named after the master baker's daughter.

For 150 lebkuchen:

- 6 eggs
- 1 tablespoon candied ginger, finely chopped
- ½ teaspoon each of ground cinnamon, cloves, coriander, allspice, mace, cardamom
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups (240 g) coarsely chopped hazelnuts
- 2½ cups (240 g) finely ground hazelnuts
- ½ cup (50 g) coarsely chopped walnuts
- 1 cup (100 g) candied orange peel, finely chopped
- 1 cup (100 g) candied lemon peel, finely chopped
- 2⅓ cups (470 g) sugar
- grated peel of 1 organic lemon
- grated peel of 1 organic orange
- thin round wafers for baking, approx. 2-inch diameter

Instructions:

Combine the sugar, eggs, and vanilla in a mixing bowl and whisk it until the mixture is light and frothy and the sugar has dissolved. Then add the nuts, candied lemon, orange peel, ginger, and all the other spices to the mixture. Cover the bowl and let rest for 24 hours.

The next day shape small balls using about half an ounce (15 g) of the gingerbread mixture, and place one each in the center of the wafers, making sure to leave an edge of about ¼ inch (3–5mm) all around. Preheat the oven to 400°F (200° Centigrade) to ensure swift baking. Line your baking sheet with parchment paper and place the wafers on top. Bake for 12–15 minutes until the wafers turn light brown. It is important that the lebkuchen are not quite done inside. Cool them on a rack after baking.

Note: The baked elisenlebkuchen must rest for a few days. Since they should be soft and gooey, we recommend placing them in a cookie jar, covering them with parchment paper and topping it with a few apple peels. Close the jar and leave it shut for about 10 days. By then, the lebkuchen will have a perfect texture.

