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Dessert recipes for this Christmas

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## Marzipan 'Huesos de Santo' (Saint's bones)

### METHOD

#### Prepare the marzipan

1. If you're using whole almonds, you'll need to blanch them first to remove the skins.
2. Dry the almonds with kitchen towel and grind them as fine as you can.
3. It's a good idea to add 1 or 2 tablespoons of sugar to the almonds when you're grinding them. It results in a looser, more powdery texture, rather than an oily paste (best avoided). Set aside. You can skip this step if you're using pre-prepared ground almonds.
4. Add water and sugar to a pan. As the water heats up, stir the mixture to dissolve the sugar.
5. Leave the mixture to simmer for 1 or 2 minutes to make a light syrup.
6. Gradually add the syrup to the ground almonds, stirring well to combine. Take care not to add too much water, adding a little at a time to avoid making the dough too wet.
7. If you're using almonds you've prepared yourself, you'll need much less water than you need for pre-prepared ground almonds.
8. It's best to add the syrup a little at a time, then knead and continue adding more until you reach your desired consistency. I used about 65 ml of the syrup.
9. Add the lemon zest to the dough. Always avoid the white pith of the lemon, you don't want it to be bitter. Mix until well combined, and form a ball of marzipan dough.
10. Leave to rest for around 2 hours so it dries out a little.

### INGREDIENTS

- For the marzipan: 250g ground almonds
- 200g sugar
- 75-100ml water
- Zest of one lemon
- Icing sugar (to dust your surface)
- For the filling: 4 medium egg yolks
- 100g sugar
- 50g water
- For the final glaze: 200g icing sugar
- 5 tbsp water

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## Knead and the shape the marzipan

1. Place a sheet of baking paper on the kitchen worktop and dust with icing sugar.
2. Take a piece of marzipan dough and use a rolling pin to roll it out flat.
3. You need to roll it flat to a maximum of 3 mm. If you don't roll it thin enough, you'll end up with very stodgy bones.
4. Using a ruler and knife, cut the dough into strips measuring around 5 cm wide.
5. Use a skewer to score small lines into the marzipan to give them the traditional line pattern.
6. Cut each strip into 6 cm pieces.
7. You'll need a wooden stick or similar to make the little rolls from each marzipan square. I used the handle of a wooden spoon.
8. Press the edges where the two ends meet gently, and leave the rolls to dry for a few hours. Set aside.

## Prepare the filling

Whilst the bones are drying, prepare the filling. Separate the egg whites from the yolks, and whisk the yolks. Set aside.

Make a syrup with water and sugar. Add the two ingredients to a pan, stir, and cook for around 5 minutes. Remove from the heat. Gradually add the syrup to the yolk mixture, stirring with a whisk. It's important to do this carefully so the yolk mixture doesn't curdle.

Pour the mixture into a bowl and place it into a bain marie, stirring almost continuously, until the mixture thickens. This step will take around 30 minutes.

You need the cream to be quite thick, although it will continue to thicken a little as it cools. It needs to be a relatively firm consistency to stay inside the marzipan bones.

Allow the cream to cool, then place in the fridge for an hour.

## Assembling and decorating the saint's bones

Pour the filling into piping bag and squeeze the mixture into the marzipan bones.

Prepare a glaze with icing sugar and water.

Mix the two ingredients together until thick and creamy.

You won't need much water, around 5 tablespoons should do it.

Use two forks to dip the bones into the glaze, and place them on a wire rack so the excess drips off.

Wait for the glaze to dry before handling.

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## Christmas orange cake

### METHOD

1. Slice the whole orange (with the peel intact) and place in the jug of your blender. Blend, then pour the pulp into a bowl.
2. Melt the butter in a pan on the hob.
3. Crack the eggs into a large bowl, and beat with a whisk. Add the white and brown sugar, and continue to beat together. Next, add the Greek yogurt, butter, flour and baking powder.
4. Gently fold in the ingredients to combine. Add the orange pulp and stir into the mixture.
5. Grease a round cake mould with butter and dust with flour. Pour the mixture into the cake mould and place in a preheated oven at 170°C for 45-50 minutes. Remove the cake from the oven, leave to cool, and finally turn it out from the mould.
6. To make the syrup, squeeze the juice of an orange. Put a pan on the hob and add the orange juice and brown sugar. Heat for a few minutes, stirring from time to time.
7. Brush the cake with syrup, and it's ready to serve.

### Tips and tricks

To check your sponge is cooked through, use a long skewer to pierce the centre - if it comes out clean, the cake has set.

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 oranges
- 250g plain flour
- 200g sugar
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- 125g Greek yogurt
- 50g brown sugar
- 3 eggs
- 100g butter

For the syrup:

- 1 orange
- 50g brown sugar

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## Chocolate 'Magdalena' Cupcakes

### METHOD

Prepare the chocolate magdalenas

We're going to make around 20 magdalenas.

1. Beat the eggs with a whisk in a large bowl, using quick, folding movements, until it reaches a fluffy, well-aerated consistency.
2. Add the sugar gradually, continuing to beat the mixture. Next add the oil, pouring in slowly and combining with the other ingredients.
3. Follow the same process with the milk, then add the flour and cocoa (first sift into a separate bowl), and finally add the baking powder.
4. Place the mixture into the fridge, and whilst the mixture is cooling, arrange your silicone moulds on a baking tray. Place a paper case into each mould.
5. Before you pour the mixture into the moulds, give it a quick whisk as it will have thickened a little in the fridge.

### Baking and decorating

1. Fill the cases 3/4 full, and then add 5 or 6 chocolate chips on to the top of the mixture.
2. Bake for 15 minutes at 200°C.
3. You'll know they're ready when they've risen and have turned a lovely golden colour. Keep an eye on them when they're cooking, as cooking times will vary depending on how hot your oven is.
4. When they're ready, remove from the oven and leave to rest in the moulds to ensure the dough sets well.

### INGREDIENTS

- 200g plain white flour
- 70g pure cocoa powder
- 10g baking powder
- 125g white sugar
- 3 eggs
- 50ml whole milk
- 100ml mild extra virgin olive oil
- Silicone muffin moulds (optional)
- Paper muffin cases
- Your favourite dark chocolate (70% cocoa is best)
- 50g dark chocolate chips

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## Ginger biscuits

### METHOD

#### Make the dough

1. Before you begin, sift the dry ingredients (flour, ginger and cinnamon). It's a good idea to have them to hand when you need them. Use a sieve to do this. This step helps to aerate the flour, and will make the dough less lumpy.
2. Beat the butter and brown sugar together with a whisk or food processor. Remember to use softened butter. Blend the ingredients together until pale, with a slightly fluffy consistency.
3. Add the egg, and continue to blend until all the ingredients are well combined.
4. Continue to blend the mixture, and add the honey as you do so.
5. Add the dry ingredients you set aside earlier. Lower the speed of the mixer to a minimum, add a third of the mixture and beat until the flour is fully incorporated. Keep adding the dry ingredients until combined. Take care not to work the dough too much as that can result in a too-hard biscuit.
6. Divide the dough into two, flatten slightly, and wrap in cling film. Leave to rest in the fridge for around 15 minutes. This cools the dough, hardening it a little and making it easier to roll with a rolling pin.

### INGREDIENTS

Quantities for 24 biscuits

- 450g flour
- 200g butter
- 100g brown sugar or whole cane sugar
- 1 medium egg
- 80g honey (mild is better)
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground ginger

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## Cut the gingerbread man shapes

1. Roll out the dough to a maximum of 5 or 6mm thick. My biscuits were 6mm. It's a good idea to use a rolling pin with guides, so you can set it to roll at the right thickness and achieve a completely uniform thickness. The photo below shows the one I used.
2. Once you've rolled the dough, leave it to rest for in the fridge for 1 hour. Leaving it to rest in the cold will make it firmer when you're cutting your shapes, and the biscuits won't lose their shape as they cook. If you're in a hurry, you can put it in the freezer for 20 minutes.
3. Once the dough has rested, cut your chosen shapes. I made these Christmas gingerbread men, but you can use any cookie cutters you've got at home.
4. Line your baking tray with baking paper. Arrange the biscuits on the tray, leaving a 2cm gap between each one.
5. Bake the biscuits at 180°C for around 15 minutes, or until the edges begin to brown. There's no hard and fast cooking time, it depends on the size and thickness of your shapes. Generally speaking the edges will darken when the biscuits are ready. Take care not to cook them for too long as they'll go quite hard.
6. When they're ready, remove the tray from the oven and leave to rest for around 5 minutes. Finally, transfer your gingerbread men to a wire rack to finish cooling.

## Decorate your ginger and cinnamon biscuits

1. I decorated these using piping icing. I left some icing white, and used food colouring to make green and red icing. To save time, I used pre-prepared icing that just requires a little added water. If you want to make the icing yourself, take a look at the link for some royal icing recipes.
2. You could also use white chocolate to decorate your biscuits - either leave it as it is or use food colouring to make different colours. Just heat it up in a bain marie.
3. You need to use an icing nozzle with a fine tip. The lines will be thinner, and you'll get a neater, more precise result.
4. You can use chocolate or caramel chips to make the buttons.

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## Homemade almond 'polvorón' shortbread

### METHOD

#### Make the shortbread

1. Chop the roasted and peeled almonds. Toast the flour, taking care to not let it burn, just cook.
2. To do this, put it in a dry frying pan over a low heat and cook, stirring constantly, for around 7 minutes. Remove from the heat before it starts to darken.
3. Sift the flour to get rid of any lumps. Once the flour has cooled down, add the lemon zest, cinnamon, 100g caster sugar, ground almonds and softened lard.
4. Use caster sugar. This is important to avoid grains of sugar clumping together. The result will be much thinner shortbread.
5. Knead the dough until smooth and uniform. Stretch out the dough between two sheets of baking paper until it's around 2cm thick.
6. Use a cookie cutter to make the shortbread shapes. Place the shortbread shapes in the fridge until the dough has hardened. The amount of time you leave it depends on how soft your dough is.

#### Baking and decorating the shortbread

1. Pre-heat your oven to 180°C and bake the shortbread for 12-13 minutes. Set your oven to fan, with top and bottom heat source.
2. When the shortbread's ready, remove the baking tray and put the shortbread on a wire rack to cool. Take care, as the dough will still be soft and may crumble or break easily.
3. Dust the shortbread with the remaining caster sugar and leave to cool completely before handling.

### INGREDIENTS

- 200g lard
- 400g wheat flour
- 100g of roasted peeled almonds (unsalted)
- 1 lemon
- 1 heaped tsp ground cinnamon (around 10g)
- 150g icing sugar (100g for the shortbread and 50g for dusting)

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