

Cuccidati

For the pastry:

3 pounds flour
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups sugar
2 tablespoons baking powder
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt
6 ounces cold unsalted butter
6 ounces cold lard or vegetable shortening
6 eggs
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups milk
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

For the filling:

3 pounds of good-quality dried figs
4.5 ounces raisins
 $\frac{3}{4}$ pound of walnuts
3 tangerine peels
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups honey
A little warm water

To make the pastry, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a very large bowl. Whisk them together until well combined. With a pastry blender, work in the butter and lard (or vegetable shortening) until the mixture forms coarse crumbs. I use the pastry blender with my right hand and work the dough between my fingertips with my left hand. Beat the eggs with the milk and vanilla. Using a large wooden spoon, combine the liquid with the dry ingredients until it forms a ball. Use your hands to gently kneed and shape the ball. Place the ball in a large plastic bag and refrigerate for several hours or overnight. This makes rolling the pastry much easier.

Snip off the hard stems from the figs. In a bowl, combine and mix the figs, the raisins, the nuts, and the tangerine peel (no need to remove the pith), torn into smaller pieces. Take a handful of the mixed ingredients and pass them through the fine blade of a food grinder, continuing until you use all the mixture. Do not try to grind the ingredients separately because they are very hard to combine once ground.

Add the honey to the ground mixture. Moisten with a little bit (generally about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) of warm water. You want a moist mixture that will form nicely in your hands.

Cut off $\frac{1}{3}$ of the pastry and return the remaining portion to the refrigerator. Roll out the dough on floured surface with a floured rolling pin. Roll out a rectangle about 2-feet long by 8-inches wide, until you achieve a thin pastry (much like pie crust) that is less than $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick.

With your hands roll the filling into a 1-inch-diameter sausage shape, and lay it lengthwise onto the pastry sheet about an inch from the front edge. This can be done in sections attaching one piece of filling to the next with your hands.

Roll the front edge of the pastry over the filling.

Cut the pastry lengthwise, leaving enough of an edge on the far side of the filling to cover the whole roll. Pinch the edges of the pastry end together to seal the roll. With the palms of your hands roll the entire sausage shape on the cutting board to create a nice even log. Cut the log into about 3-inch lengths.

Take each 3-inch length and gently pull it with your hands to elongate slightly. This is done because the pastry tends to thicken as it sits, and you want it to remain as thin as possible. If necessary, roll the cut piece with the palms of your hands on the floured board to create a smooth well-shaped roll.

With the seam side down, cut slits on one side of the cuccidati at about 1/4-inch intervals. Bend each cookie into a crescent or half-moon shape and place on a heavy, ungreased baking sheet.

You should be able to get 2 to 3 rolls from the rolled-out pastry. Cut the remaining refrigerated pastry in half and proceed in the same way, until you've used all the pastry and filling. If you have extra pastry and not enough filling, wrap and freeze the remaining pastry for another use.

Bake the cookies on the bottom shelf of a preheated 350° oven for 8-10 minutes. Move the sheet to a high-level rack and bake about 5-7 minutes longer. The tops of the cookies should be a very pale brown color. Remove the cookies to a rack and allow to cool. When fully cooled, dust heavily with powdered sugar. Makes about 72 cookies.