

AMARETTI

Almond Cookies

MAKES 15 TO
20 AMARETTI

2½ cups (300 g)
almond flour or
finely ground
almonds

1 cup (200 g) sugar

2 large (60 g) egg
whites, beaten

15 to 20 almonds for
decoration

My grandmother Malu used to make the best amaretti, delicious yet extremely simple almond cookies. We eat them for Passover, and year-round as well, as everybody enjoys them for an afternoon snack along with a cup of coffee. In Italy, you can find two types of amaretti: crunchy ones and soft ones. This recipe is for the soft type, which are common among Sephardic Jews.

Preheat the oven to 300°F (150°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the almond flour and sugar.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, or in a large bowl, using a handheld mixer, whisk the egg whites until they hold firm peaks, about 5 minutes.

Add the beaten egg whites to the flour and sugar mixture and stir until a soft, sticky dough forms.

Use a small cookie scoop or your fingers to portion the dough into mounds about the size of a walnut (¾ ounce/20 g if you have a scale). Roll each one into a ball and place on the prepared pan, leaving 1 inch (3 cm) of space between the cookies. Press gently on each ball to flatten the top and insert an almond into the center of the cookie for decoration.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the cookies are slightly cracked and golden on top. Keep an eye on the amaretti while they are baking, because they tend to burn quickly on the bottom. If the bottoms of the amaretti start to color too fast, move the pan to a rack closer to the top of the oven, and reduce the baking time if necessary. When they are done, transfer the amaretti to a wire rack to cool.

Stored in an airtight container or cookie tin, amaretti will keep for up to 5 days.



HRAIMI

Libyan-Style Spicy Tomato Fish Steaks

SERVES 4

½ cup (120 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

1 large onion, finely chopped

5 tablespoons (75 g) tomato paste (see Notes)

½ to 1 teaspoon pure chili powder

2 garlic cloves, crushed

½ cups (355 ml) water

½ teaspoon kosher salt

4 thick yellowfin, ahi, or albacore tuna steaks, about 4 ounces (115 g) each (see Notes)

½ teaspoon ground caraway (see Notes)

Juice of ½ lemon

Rome is home to two Jewish communities: Roman-born and -raised people, who define themselves as “di piazza” (“from the square”), and Libyan Jews, first-generation (and now second- and third-generation) immigrants who fled their native country in the 1960s and found a safe haven in Italy. The most famous Libyan Jewish specialty, hraimi, fish in a spicy tomato sauce, has become a regular dish in the homes of most Roman Jews, Libyan or not, as a mainstay of Shabbat dinner. Serve hraimi as a starter, with some crunchy ossi buns (page 327) fresh out of the oven alongside: I guarantee there will be no leftovers.

Pour the olive oil into a large nonstick sauté pan or skillet set over low heat, add the onion, and cook until it is translucent, about 10 minutes.

Add the tomato paste, chili powder, and crushed garlic to the pan, then pour in the water, add the salt, and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Put the fish in the skillet and cook for 15 minutes, or until the sauce thickens.

Add the ground caraway to the sauce and cook for a few more minutes, then add the lemon juice and take the pan off the heat. Let the hraimi cool to room temperature.

Serve, providing plenty of bread to “clean up” all the sauce once the fish is eaten.

In the unlikely event that you have leftovers, hraimi keeps well in the fridge, covered or in an airtight container, for 2 days.

NOTES

- You can substitute ½ cup (115 g) tomato puree (passata) for the tomato paste.
- Grouper and cod fillets work well here instead of tuna. One of my favorite shortcuts is using canned tuna, but only if high-quality canned tuna in big chunks is available. In that case, prepare the sauce and add the tuna at the end, when the sauce is ready.
- If you don't have ground caraway, cumin is an excellent substitute.

