

Crisp, Long-Lasting Biscotti

350°F

The good news: The most flavorful biscotti are made with a small amount of fat.

The challenge: Despite their elegant appearance, the twice-baked Italian cookies known as biscotti are easy to make. A longer-than-average baking time yields a uniquely crunchy texture and also gives them an unusually long shelf life. Together, these factors make biscotti an excellent choice for home bakers. To find out how to make the very best biscotti, we decided to test and compare dozens of traditional recipes.

The solution: Our results were surprising. The type and quantity of fat dramatically affected the taste, texture, and shelf life of the resulting biscotti. In the matter of taste, the fresh-baked biscotti containing sweet cream butter provided a superior and irresistible rich flavor. Our favorite combination of ingredients, however, included whole eggs, with no additional yolks or butter, because it resulted in the truest delivery – lean and direct – of the flavors in the cookies. Also, the recipes using whole eggs seemed to get even better with time; they tasted great and remained very crisp after a week and, if stored properly, would keep for several weeks.

For good measure: Make sure that you allow enough time for both of the baking steps. All biscotti recipes share the common characteristics of quick preparation time and a relatively long baking time because they are twice baked. Also, it is preferable to use a rubber spatula, waxed paper, or plastic wrap if you have trouble handling the dough. Resist the urge to add more flour. One final note: biscotti must be completely cooled before storage, to ensure that all the moisture has escaped.

Lemon-Anise Biscotti (mod RG)

350°F

Makes 3–4 dozen. A Sicilian specialty, this recipe produces a relatively hard biscuit — perfect with an afternoon cup of coffee.

1. Sift first 3 ingredients together in a small bowl.

2 cups (9.5 oz/270g) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt

2. Whisk sugar and eggs in a large bowl to a light lemon color.
Stir in next 3 ingredients.
Sift dry ingredients over egg mixture, then fold in until dough is just combined.

1 cup sugar
2 large eggs
1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
Minced zest from 1 whole lemon
1 tablespoon anise seed

The dry ingredients

3. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to **350°F**.

Halve dough and turn each portion onto an oiled cookie sheet covered with parchment. Using floured hands, quickly stretch each portion of dough into a rough 13-by-2-inch log, placing them about 3 inches apart on the cookie sheet. Pat each dough shape to smooth it.

4. **BAKE**, turning pan once, until loaves are golden and just beginning to crack on top, **12+12 = 24 minutes**.

5. Cool the loaves for **20 minutes**; lower oven temperature to **325°F**.

Cut each loaf diagonally into 3/8-inch slices with a serrated knife. Lay the slices about 1/2-inch apart on a cooling rack set on the cookie sheet, cut side up, and return them to the oven.

BAKE, until crisp and golden brown on both sides, about **7 + 7 = 14 minutes**. Turn off oven. Dry biscotti in oven (with door open) for 30 minutes. Transfer biscotti to wire rack and cool completely. (Biscotti can be stored in an airtight container for **at least 1 month**.)

VARIATION. Follow the mixing, baking, and slicing instructions for Lemon-Anise Biscotti, substituting **1/2 cup of unhulled sesame seeds** for the anise seeds in the recipe. Brush the top of each loaf of dough with an **egg wash** and sprinkle with **additional sesame seeds**.

Spiced Biscotti (not tried)

350°F

Makes 4–5 dozen. If desired, substitute three whole eggs for the two eggs and two egg yolks in this recipe.

1. Sift first 8 ingredients together in a small bowl.

2 1/4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground white pepper
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger

2. Whisk sugar and eggs to a light lemon color.

Stir in vanilla extract.

Sift dry ingredients over egg mixture, then fold in until dough is just combined.

1 cup sugar
2 large eggs plus 2 yolks

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

The dry ingredients

3. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to **350°F**.

Halve dough and turn each portion onto an oiled cookie sheet covered with parchment. Using floured hands, quickly stretch each portion of dough into a rough 13-by-2-inch log, placing them about 3 inches apart on the cookie sheet. Pat each dough shape to smooth it.

4. **BAKE**, turning pan once, until loaves are golden and just beginning to crack on top, **12+12 = 24 minutes**.

5. Cool the loaves for **20 minutes**; lower oven temperature to **325°F**.

Cut each loaf diagonally into 3/8-inch slices with a serrated knife. Lay the slices about 1/2-inch apart on a cooling rack set on the cookie sheet, cut side up, and return them to the oven.

BAKE, until crisp and golden brown on both sides, about **8 + 8 = 16 minutes**. Turn off oven. Dry biscotti in oven (with door open) for 30 minutes. Transfer biscotti to wire rack and cool completely. (Biscotti can be stored in an airtight container for **at least 1 month**.)

VARIATIONS. Macerate **3/4 cup currants, chopped raisins, or dates** in **1/4 cup brandy or Marsala** for **at least 1 hour**. Drain and fold into the dough in step 2, adding **a teaspoon or so of the macerating liquid** to the dough.

Honey-Lavender Biscotti (mod RG)

350°F

Makes 4–5 dozen. Based on the flavors of a popular Provençal ice cream, these honey-lavender biscotti are best made with an assertive honey, such as a spicy clover. Dried lavender blossoms, also an ingredient in herbes de Provence, can be found in spice or herbal stores, or see Where to Shop link below.

RG NOTE: Base on original recipe, the dough was very gooey, and impossible to handle. I added almost 1 more cup of flour - but this affected the flavor of the biscotti. I increased the ingredients (but NOT the liquid ones) to reflect the revised three cups of flour.

1. Sift first 4 ingredients together in a small bowl.

3 cups (14.25 oz/405g) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt

2. Whisk sugar and eggs in a large bowl to a light lemon color.

3/4 cup sugar
3 large eggs

3. Stir in next 3 (or 4) ingredients.

Sift dry ingredients over egg mixture, then fold in until dough is just combined.

3 tablespoons honey
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 tablespoons minced zest from 1 orange
1 1/2 tablespoons dried lavender blossoms (optional)

The dry ingredients

4. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to **350°F**.

Halve dough and turn each portion onto an oiled cookie sheet covered with parchment. Using floured hands, quickly stretch each portion of dough into a rough 13-by-2-inch log, placing them about 3 inches apart on the cookie sheet. Pat each dough shape to smooth it.

5. **BAKE**, turning pan once, until loaves are golden and just beginning to crack on top, **12+12 = 24 minutes**.

6. Cool the loaves for **20 minutes**; lower oven temperature to **325°F**.

Cut each loaf diagonally into 3/8-inch slices with a serrated knife. Lay the slices about 1/2-inch apart on a cooling rack set on the cookie sheet, cut side up, and return them to the oven.

BAKE, until crisp and golden brown on both sides, about **10 + 10 = 20 minutes**. Turn off oven. Dry biscotti in oven (with door open) for 30 minutes. Transfer biscotti to wire rack and cool completely. (Biscotti can be stored in an airtight container for **at least 1 month**.)

Dried Lavender. The bluish-purple buds of the lavender plant are dried and used in herbal cures and teas as well as in recipes such as Honey Lavender Biscotti. Much of the lavender sold in this country is imported from France, where it is graded according to color intensity. The highest quality buds are the bluest and are known as "ultra." Although some health food or gourmet stores may carry lavender, it may be easier to order this special herb by mail.

Top-quality dried lavender buds are available from Mountain Rose Herbs (P.O. Box 2000, Redway, CA 95560; 800-879-3337). Larger quantities can be purchased (in either eight-ounce or one-pound bags), but four ounces is enough for numerous batches of biscotti. (As of January 2001, www.penzys.com does not carry lavender except in Herbes de Provence.)

Orange-Pecan Biscotti (mod RG)

350°F

Makes 3–4 dozen. The addition of a small amount of butter produces a richer, more cookielike texture. Although they will keep at least two weeks in an airtight container, these biscotti are especially good when eaten the same day they are baked.

1. **PREHEAT OVEN** to **350°F**. Toast the pecans for 6-8 minutes on a baking sheet, stirring them around every 2 minutes.

2. Sift first 3 ingredients together in a small bowl.

2 cups (9.5 oz/270g) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt

3. Beat butter and sugar together in bowl of electric mixer until light and smooth.

Add eggs one at a time, and then the extracts.

Stir in pecans and zest.

Sift dry ingredients over egg mixture, then fold in until dough is just mixed.

4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 cup sugar

2 large eggs

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon almond extract
1/2 teaspoon Triple Sec (my addition)

3/4 cup coarsely chopped pecan (toasted, then cooled)
3 tablespoons minced zest from 1 orange

The dry ingredients

4. Don't prepare the orange zest too far in advance. The oils will seep out, and went right through the wax paper I was using!

5. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to **350°F**.

Halve dough and turn each portion onto an oiled cookie sheet covered with parchment. Using floured hands, quickly stretch each portion of dough into a rough 13-by-2-inch log, placing them about 3 inches apart on the cookie sheet. Pat each dough shape to smooth it.

6. **BAKE**, turning pan once, until loaves are golden and just beginning to crack on top, **12+12 = 24 minutes**.

7. Cool the loaves for **20 minutes**; lower oven temperature to **325°F**.

Cut each loaf diagonally into 3/8-inch slices with a serrated knife. Lay the slices about 1/2-inch apart on a cooling rack set on the cookie sheet, cut side up, and return them to the oven.

BAKE, until crisp and golden brown on both sides, about **7 + 7 = 14 minutes**. Turn off oven. Dry biscotti in oven (with door open) for 30 minutes. Transfer biscotti to wire rack and cool completely. (Biscotti can be stored in an airtight container for **at least 1 month**.)

VARIATIONS. Original recipe called for **whole almonds with skins**; toasted, cooled, and coarsely chopped. You may substitute **toasted hazelnuts** for the pecans in this recipe. A **combination of hazelnuts and almonds** also works very well.

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