



zēlos
authentic greek artisan

**BONUS
VASILOPITA
RECIPE**

GREEK CHRISTMAS COOKIES
FOR
YOUR HOLIDAY COOKIE EXCHANGE

Welcome to our Holiday ebook!

Christmas in Greece was traditionally a smaller celebration than Easter or New Year's/St. Basil's Day. People would often decorate small wooden boats (Christmas trees only arrived in the 1960s & 70s!), and you'll still find beautifully decorated lit boats on many of the city squares across Greece. Children would receive gifts from St. Basil on New Year's Eve and families would cut the "vasilopita" sweet bread to see who would get the lucky coin.

Eventually, St. Basil morphed into a Santa Claus-like figure and gifts are now exchanged more often on Christmas Eve. But no matter what the tradition, holiday desserts are always on the table! Honey, walnuts, almonds, cinnamon & cloves come together in kitchens throughout Greece to make delectable treats - try making them yourself and bring a Greek touch to your next cookie exchange! Add a fun touch to your New Year's celebrations with our bonus recipe at the end for "Vasilopita" sweet bread - you just might get lucky this year!

Have a wonderful holiday season - may it be a happy & healthy one with lots of delicious meals with family & friends.

Maria, Pauline, Eleftheria, Alicia & Jean



**RECIPES
IN YOUR
E-BOOK**



MELOMAKARONA



KOURABIEDES



AMYGDALOTA



FILLED COOKIES



BAKLAVA





MELOMAKARONA

Holiday baking in Greece means traditional Christmas melomakarona honey & walnut cookies. This recipe comes from Vefa Alexiadou, Greece's Julia Child, and was a family favorite when Maria was a child.

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE COOKIE DOUGH

1 1/2 cup oil (traditionally we use olive oil, although some prefer a 50/50 blend of olive and sunflower oil to make the cookies a little lighter)

1/2 cup butter

1 cup sugar

3/4 cup freshly-squeezed orange juice

1/4 cup brandy or cognac

2 tsp orange zest

2 tsp baking powder

1 tsp baking soda

8 cups all purpose flour

FOR THE SYRUP

2 cups honey

2 cups sugar

2 cups water

FOR THE TOPPING

1 1/2 cups chopped walnuts

1 tbsp cinnamon

1/2 tbsp ground clove

PREPARATION

Preheat your oven to 350F.

Mix the first 6 ingredients for 4 minutes at high speed.

In a separate large mixing bowl, combine the flour with the baking soda and baking powder.

Make a crater in the dry ingredients and pour in the liquid ingredients. Slowly mix them well until you have a manageable dough (it will be a bit oily and shouldn't stick to your hands).

Take a teaspoon and scoop out small pieces of dough and roll in your hands, shaping into a slightly-flattened oval (as in the picture), or roll out the dough and use a cookie cutter to make other shapes.

Place the cookies on a baking sheet and bake at 350 degrees for approximately 30 minutes, until the cookies are a nicely browned.

In the meantime, prepare the syrup by boiling together the honey, sugar and water for 5 minutes. Skim off any foam that may form and then let the syrup cool.

When the cookies come out of the oven, transfer them onto a plate and spoon over the warm (not hot!) syrup, letting the syrup soak for a few minutes until it's fully absorbed. Let them cool completely.

Make the topping by mixing the chopped walnuts with the spices, and then sprinkle over each cookie. Transfer the melomakarona to individual paper or foil baking cups. They'll keep fresh in a sealed container for up to a month.





KOURABIEDES

These powdered sugar-topped butter cookies are like a sweet Greek shortbread, with chopped roasted almonds giving them a special crunch!

INGREDIENTS

2 cups butter, softened at room temperature

1/2 cup powdered sugar

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 cup blanched almonds, roasted & chopped

4-5 cups all-purpose flour

FOR THE TOPPING

1-2 cups powdered sugar

PREPARATION

Preheat your oven to 350F.

Beat the butter and sugar with a mixer until they become white and fluffy.

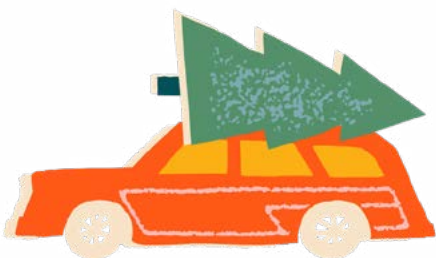
Add 2 cups of the flour, the vanilla extract and the almonds. Knead lightly, adding flour little-by-little until your dough is soft and fluffy and doesn't stick to your fingers. Watch out! Don't over-knead or your kourambiedes will become too dense.

Take a teaspoon and scoop out the dough to roll into individual balls, or roll out some of your dough to about 1/4" thickness and use your favorite holiday cookie cutters to make different shapes.

Place the cookies onto a non-greased cookie sheet and bake them for 30 minutes, until they have a light, golden color.

On a separate piece of parchment paper, sift a generous layer of powdered sugar and place the warm cookies on top. Sift more powdered sugar on top or, if you've made little balls, roll them in the sugar to coat evenly. Make sure you do this when the cookies are hot from the oven so that the sugar sticks!

Let the cookies cool and then transfer to individual paper or foil baking cups. They'll keep fresh in a sealed container for up to a month. Enjoy!





AMYGDALOTA - GREEK ISLAND ALMOND COOKIES

There are nearly as many versions of these almond drop cookies as there are Greek islands! We love this version with a whole piece of preserved fruit in the middle.

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE COOKIE DOUGH

3 1/2 cups blanched almonds, finely chopped
2 1/2 cups powdered sugar
1 tbsp lemon juice
1/2 tsp vanilla extract
1/4 tsp bitter almond extract
2 tbsp rose water
2 egg whites, lightly beaten

FOR THE ASSEMBLY

Diced Chian Tangerine, Bergamot or 4 Citrus Fruits Spoon Sweet; you can also use the whole pitted cherries from the Sour Cherry Spoon Sweet - whichever you choose, be sure to drain the syrup... but save it in a bowl, it makes a delicious breakfast topping!!

Whole cloves

Powdered sugar

PREPARATION - MAKES 80 PIECES

HOW TO MAKE THE ALMOND PASTE

In a bowl, blend with a fork the almonds and powdered sugar. Make a crater and add in the lemon, extracts, and half of the egg whites. Mix with your fingers until the dough comes off the sides of the bowl. Add as much of the rest of the egg white as needed until you get a thick dough.

Sprinkle the powdered sugar on a flat surface, preferably marble, and place the dough on top. Knead the dough lightly on the powdered sugar until the sugar is blended in but be careful not to overdo it, as the almonds will release their oil, making the cookies too greasy.

Almond dough dries out very quickly, so if you're not going to make your cookies right away, wrap up the dough in plastic film and store in your refrigerator for up to two weeks. If the dough is too hard when you take it out, knead in a little bit of rose water until it becomes soft again.

TO ASSEMBLY THE AMYGDALOTÁ ALMOND COOKIES

Place some powdered sugar in a small bowl so that you can dust your fingers with it every time you make a cookie.

Then take a small piece of the almond paste and shape it into a drop-shaped cookie, as in the picture. Put a piece of citrus peel or a whole sour cherry in the middle.

Add a clove at the top to decorate and place the cookies on a plate. Cover tightly with plastic wrap so that the amygdalotá don't dry out and harden. You can keep them without refrigerating for a week. Enjoy!





CITRUS-FILLED COOKIES

Classic jam-filled cookies get a Greek island touch, thanks to the fragrant marmalades from [Citrus Scent of Memory](#), in this recipe from Greek food blogger Pandora.

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE COOKIE DOUGH

3 cups all purpose flour
3/4 cup butter
1/3 cup sugar
100 ml kumquat liqueur (or other citrus-based liquor)
1/4 tsp salt

FOR THE FILLING

Half a jar of your favorite [Citrus-flavored marmalade](#), like Chian Tangerine, Triple Citrus Fruits or Peach, Watermelon & Bitter Almond

FOR THE TOPPING

Powdered sugar to decorate

PREPARATION

Preheat your oven to 350F.

Mix the butter and sugar on high speed until white and creamy. Add the liqueur and keep mixing until well blended.

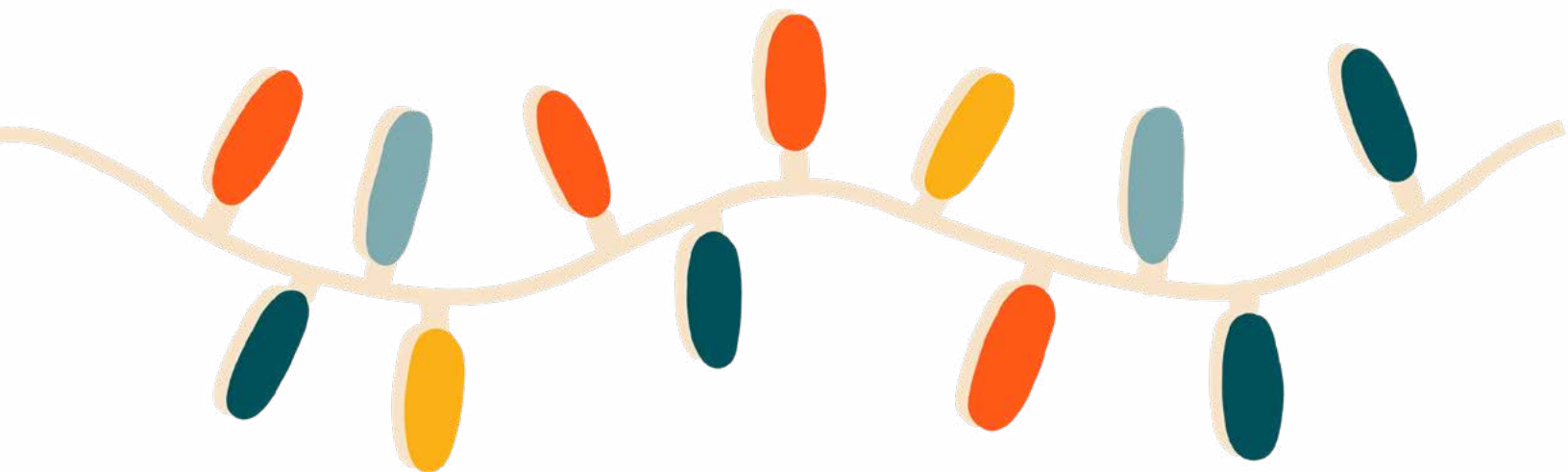
Add the flour and the salt and mix well until all the dry ingredients are absorbed, but be careful not to over-mix the dough.

Roll out the dough to about 1/3" thickness and cut it with your favorite cookie cutters.

Spoon some of the marmalade in the middle of a cookie, leaving space on the edges. Place another cookie on top and press gently to seal.

Place the cookies on a baking sheet and bake at 350 degrees until golden brown.

When they come out of the oven, sift a light layer of powdered sugar to decorate them. Enjoy!





BAKLAVA - GREEK HONEY-WALNUT DESSERT

Baklava isn't exactly a cookie but you'll find individual pieces of it in baking cups on many a Greek holiday platter!

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE BAKLAVÁ

1 lb phyllo
2 cups coarsely chopped almonds
2 cups coarsely chopped walnuts
2 tbsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp ground clove + whole cloves
for decoration
5 cups melted butter

FOR THE SYRUP

3 cups sugar
2 cups water
1/2 cup honey
The peel of a thoroughly cleaned
lemon

PREPARATION

Preheat your oven to 350 F.

In a bowl, blend with a fork the almonds, walnuts, cinnamon and ground clove.

Using a pastry brush and the melted butter, grease a 10x15 baking dish. Carefully place a sheet of phyllo on the bottom and brush it lightly with more melted butter.

Place another phyllo sheet on top and brush that with melted butter, too. Repeat until you have four buttered sheets of phyllo.

Sprinkle some of the nut mixture on top and then cover with two buttered sheets of phyllo. Sprinkle more of the nut mixture on top and then cover again with two more buttered sheets of phyllo. Repeat until you're left with just four sheets of phyllo to cover the last layer of nuts. Be sure to butter each of those last four sheets.

Using a very sharp pointed knife, cut the finished baklavá into squares or diamonds and add a whole clove in the center of each piece.

Pour any remaining melted butter over the baklava and spray lightly with some cold water. If you like, you can freeze your baklavá, covering with plastic wrap.

When you're ready to bake the baklavá, take off the plastic wrap if you've frozen it, or pop your freshly prepared pan in the oven.

Bake for 30 to 40 minutes until golden brown.

In the meantime, prepare your syrup by boiling the ingredients in a small pan for 5 minutes.

As soon as your baklavá comes out of the oven, pour the hot syrup evenly over it.

Let cool and then transfer the pieces to individual paper baking cups and to your holiday platter. Enjoy!





VASILÓPITA - GREEK NEW YEAR'S SWEET BREAD

As a special treat, we're sharing our recipe for traditional Greek New Year's cake, vasilópita, named after Saint Basil, whom we celebrate on New Year's Day. This sweet bread has a coin, a flourí, hidden in it and the custom is for families to cut enough pieces for everyone present on New Year's Eve, as well as a piece for the home and one for the Virgin Mary. Everyone then takes their piece and if they find the coin, they'll have good luck for the entire year. Have fun seeing who will get the flourí at your New Year's Eve party this year!

INGREDIENTS

1 lb all purpose flour
1/2 tsp salt
2 tbsp dry yeast
1/2 cup butter, melted
3/4 cup sugar
1 tsp orange peel
1 tsp lemon peel
1/2 cup hot milk
3 eggs
1 egg yolk, lightly beaten to baste the bread
Blanched almond slices or sesame seed to sprinkle on the bread as decoration

PREPARATION

Mix the flour with the salt.

Dilute the yeast in 4 tbsp of hot water. Mix in 1-2 tbsps of flour to make a thick paste and put it aside for 10 minutes until it bubbles. If you don't see bubbles, your yeast is likely stale and you should try again with a fresh pack. In a large mixing bowl, blend the sugar, peels, and the hot milk. Add the eggs and mix with your fingers to break the yolks and blend.

Add the yeast mixture and 1/3 of the flour, mixing lightly with your hands. Add another 1/3 of the flour, mixing lightly, and then the final 1/3 of the flour, mixing just enough to get a smooth dough.

Add 1/3 of the melted butter and fold the dough over the butter; repeat two more times, folding the dough over each time you add the melted butter. The butter won't be absorbed but don't worry, it will blend in with the dough as it rises.

Cover the bowl with a dish towel and leave it in a warm place, allowing it to rise for about an hour, until it's doubled in size.

Knead the dough a few times and shape it into a single large round loaf or break up into smaller ones if you want. Wrap a small coin in wax or parchment paper and insert in to the loaf, making sure it's not visible from the outside (we don't want any cheating when the time comes to cut the pieces!).

Cover your loaf or loaves and let them rise again until they double, which will probably take around half an hour.

Preheat your oven to 400F.

Transfer the loaves to a baking sheet, and brush the tops with the beaten egg yolk. Decorate with sliced almonds or sesame seed.

Bake for around half an hour until golden brown. Cool on a rack and store in a plastic bag to keep fresh and moist. Enjoy!



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