

Mexican Shortbread Cookies

Polvorones Mexicanos



My favorite part of *polvorones* is the way they so gently crumble in your mouth—tiny, buttery morsels that appeal to folks everywhere. In fact, a vast majority of the world's cultures has learned how to combine pastry's three foundation ingredients (flour, sugar and butter) into melt-in-your-mouth satisfaction, into *polvorones* or shortbread or Chinese almond cookies or Greek kourabiedes or *sablés* or bikkies, as my Irish friends call them. In fact, it's a recipe from Ireland's most famous cook, Darina Allen, a recipe she calls Two-Four-Six Bikkies, that gave easy structure to my version. The toppings can go in a world of directions.

Makes twenty-four 2-inch cookies

4 ounces (1 stick; 8 tablespoons) butter,
preferably unsalted
1 1/4 cups flour—all-purpose white or
whole wheat flour works well, as does
1 1/3 cups white or whole-grain spelt
flour
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt

Optional toppings—1/4 to 1/3 cup of any
one of the following: finely chopped
Mexican chocolate, finely chopped
nuts (I love pecans), pumpkin or sun-
flower seeds, sesame seeds, chopped
dried or candied fruit, sprinkles
(*grajeas* in Spanish), whole currants,
crumbled banana chips, even oatmeal
or a sprinkling of anise seeds

Cut the butter into 8 pieces, scoop into a bowl and microwave for 45 seconds at 25% power just to soften a little.

Measure the flour, sugar and salt into a food processor. Pulse several times to mix thoroughly. Add the butter and pulse until completely mixed (usually 10 to 12 times) but not homogeneous. Dump the crumbly dough onto your work surface and press into a ball. Cut a 12-inch piece of plastic wrap, lay the dough in the center and cover with a second piece of plastic wrap. Use your hands to press the dough into a disk that's 1/2 inch thick. Use a rolling pin to flatten it evenly to 1/4 inch. Refrigerate 30 minutes.

Heat the oven to 350 degrees and position a rack in the middle. Peel off the top piece of plastic from the dough. Use a cookie cutter or knife to cut out cookies; gather the scraps and roll them between plastic to cut more cookies. (If it appeals, roll the dough into a square and simply cut into square, rectangular or diamond shapes.) Transfer the cookies to an ungreased baking sheet, spacing them about 1 inch apart. Sprinkle one of the optional toppings evenly over the cookies, then gently press it in.

Bake 15 to 17 minutes, until lightly browned, turning the baking sheet once halfway through. (They will be a little soft when they come out of the oven but will crisp when they cool.) Cool 2 minutes, then use a spatula to transfer the cookies to a wire cooling rack. If you chose no toppings, you can sprinkle the cookies with powdered sugar or cinnamon sugar while they're still warm. Store in a tightly sealed container.