

03/18/12 - Passover Torrone (Italian Nougat) Bars

I was inspired recently by a series of classes titled Pro Pastry 3 that I took at the Gourmandise Cooking School in Santa Monica California. I realized that with some minor changes to a recipe we made in class, that one of my all time favorite confections Torrone, could be made kosher for Passover.

Torrone is a chewy crunch bar of white Italian nougat containing roasted nuts and or dried fruits and any combination thereof. Torrone is said to have existed in Roman times. It is parave or dairy-free, contains no oil, butter, or other added fat, and has a long shelf life if stored properly.

The recipe in class contained corn syrup and the pan was lined in edible wafer paper which is made from rice. Wafer paper and corn syrup can both be found with kosher certification but many Jews don't consume corn or rice during Passover. The solution for eliminating corn syrup was adjusting the water and sugar amounts in the recipe. Next, how to keep Torrone from sticking in the pan and still be able to remove the confection once set and slice it into bars without rice paper was a problem. Instead of rice paper I custom fit and cut two rectangles from a large silpat for my cake pan. One was for the bottom and second one was for the top. I lined the 9 x 13 cake pan with a removable bottom with one piece and used the second piece to press down and even out the warm confection in the pan before it set



This Passover 2012 I want to emphasize small portioned individual desserts to create a spectacular looking buffet that everyone can pick and choose from. I love that part of the evening when the *Haggadah* has been conducted, conversations deepen as the guests linger, finally relaxed, sipping tea or coffee and savoring the last bites.

Before you begin this recipe be aware that candy making is chemistry. The key to success is following directions and being precise. Have all equipment at the ready, all ingredients measured, toasted, sliced, and at your fingertips. You will need a stand mixer, a clean medium-large saucepan for boiling syrup, a small saucepan for warming honey, an accurate candy thermometer and a 9 x 13 inch cake pan with a removable bottom. Cut and measure a large silpat to fit the cake pan if you want this kosher for Passover. If not worried about rice paper use the wafer paper that you can purchase in baking supply stores or on line.

Instructor Ruth at Gourmandise used the following recipe with a few differences;

2 cups roasted whole almonds

1 cup roasted whole hazelnuts

2 cups raw shelled whole pistachios

1 cup dried apricots, sliced into 1/2 inch pieces

1 cup dried cherries, sliced into 1/3 inch pieces

2 extra large egg whites, room temperature

1/4 cup sugar

1/8 teaspoon salt

Syrup:

1 and 1/2 cups light colored honey, like clover or orange blossom

3 and 1/2 cups sugar

2/3 cup water

1 vanilla bean

Heat oven to 250° F. Mix the nuts together in a very large bowl and place in the oven to warm until ready to combine.

Place egg whites, sugar (1/ 4 cup) and salt in bowl of a stand mixer, ready to whip with the whisk attachment. Do not whisk yet.



In a medium-large saucepan combine sugar, water, and vanilla bean. Cover and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Turn down heat and boil sugar syrup 3 minutes covered. Uncover saucepan, turn up heat to high, and boil without stirring. Place candy thermometer in saucepan with tip of thermometer in syrup in order to get an accurate reading.



While waiting for syrup to reach the correct temperature add the dried fruit to the bowl of nuts in the oven. Watch the thermometer very closely. When syrup reaches 290° F on candy thermometer, begin to whip egg whites you placed in stand mixer on high speed. Immediately add warm honey to 290° F syrup in large saucepan.

The syrup mixture will foam up and then drop back (that is why you use the medium-large saucepan). The temperature of syrup will drop a bit. Cook for a few more minutes until syrup rises to 290° F again.

Turn off heat, working quickly remove vanilla bean and slowly pour hot syrup into whipping egg whites in a steady stream from above. Be careful not to burn yourself.

Continue whipping egg whites and syrup on high for about another 3 minutes. You will see an instant change in consistency.



Remove bowl of nuts and dried fruit from oven and scrape nougat into bowl using a heat proof silicone spatula. Immediately combine nuts and nougat with spatula. Nougat hardens very fast and you have only moments to mix in nuts and smash into



Pour nougat, fast as you can into silpat lined cake pan. Flatten it out all the way into the corners using spatula. Place second custom fit silpat on top of nougat and



Let Torrone cool for about 45 minutes, until still slightly warm to the touch. Pry nougat out of pan with a spatula. Slice into bars with a very sharp, warm knife.



Just a note, I paraphrased instructor Ruth's recipe for this post and added some additional instructions and my ingredient changes.



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