

'Maids of Honour' Tarts

It is claimed that it was not Anne Boleyn's charms that first attracted Henry VIII but it was the little custard tart she was eating that first caught his eye. Allegedly, she was sitting with other maids of honour tucking into some tarts. Henry was so impressed by the pastries that he ordered the chef to work exclusively for the palace. The recipe was kept under lock and key with 'Maids of Honour' Tarts only being made for the royal court, until the recipe was 'leaked' to a John Billet in the 1700s, allegedly sold by a lady at court. He started producing the delicacies and they became a fashionable must-eat for the rich and wealthy in the bakeries around Richmond.



Ingredients:

- 500gm plain flour
- 250gm butter
- Cold water to mix
- 200gm curd cheese (or cottage cheese)
- 50gm caster sugar
- 1 lemon
- 50gm plain flour
- 2 medium eggs
- 2 tbspn lemon curd or raspberry jam
- Icing sugar to dust

Equipment:

- 2 non-stick cake baking trays
- Weighing scales
- 2 large mixing bowls
- Wooden spoon
- Jug (to break eggs)
- Fork (to beat eggs)
- Sieve
- Rolling pin
- Pastry cutter
- Palette knife
- Grater
- Teaspoon and dessert spoons

Method:

For the pastry:

1. Sift flour into a bowl.
2. Add the butter, straight from the fridge if possible, cut into cubes.
3. With very clean fingertips, rub the butter into the flour to form a breadcrumb consistency. This takes a while, so share the job out.
4. Add enough water to form a firm dough, using a large wooden spoon to begin mixing and then your hands once the mixture starts to form a ball of dough. Add a little water at a time, as you can always add more if it is too dry.
5. Cover the dough with clingfilm and place it in a cool place for at least 30 minutes. This makes it easier to handle.

For the filling:

1. Place the curd cheese, sugar and flour into a bowl.
2. Crack the eggs into the bowl one at a time and carefully mix into the flour, sugar and cheese.
3. Meanwhile, grate the zest of the lemon using the fine side of the grater. Make sure you don't grate any of the white pith.
4. Mix the zest into the cheesy mixture and beat until smooth.

For the tarts:

1. Place the pastry on a floured board and roll it out to 5mm thick.
2. Cut out circles using the cutter and place them carefully into the cake baking trays, using the palette knife to lift them.
3. Place a teaspoonful of lemon curd or jam in the bottom of each pastry tart.
4. Spoon the cheesy lemon mixture on top of the curd or jam, making sure that it is not too full. It should be just below the pastry case.
5. Ask an adult to place them in an oven (Gas mark 6, 200°C) for 20-25 minutes to bake. They should rise up and turn pale brown.
6. Allow them to cool for a few minutes and then remove from the tin using a palette knife.
7. Sprinkle with sifted icing sugar to serve.

