



BUTTERY SHORTBREAD

Makes 16 wedges. Published November 1, 2001.

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Our approachable shortbread recipe gives a few tweaks to the classic method, resulting in the ultimate version of the sandy, sweet, buttery cookie. We made our shortbread recipe more tender by adding rice flour or cornstarch to the mix. Our light handling when mixing and shaping the dough also made a difference. Our final trick: stamping out a small circle of dough from the center to ensure even baking.

If you cannot find rice flour, substitute an equal amount of cornstarch; the texture of the shortbread will be slightly affected with a faint chalkiness that dissipates with cooling and over the course of storage. When cutting the butter into cubes, work quickly so that the butter stays cold, and when molding the shortbread, form, press, and unmold it without delay. Be sure to use a plain round biscuit cutter to stamp out the center, not a fluted cutter.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 3/4** cups unbleached all-purpose flour (8.75 ounces), preferably Gold Medal or Pillsbury, protein content no higher than 10.5 percent
- 1/4** cup rice flour (1.3 ounces)
- 2/3** cup superfine sugar (4.8 ounces)
- 1/4** teaspoon table salt
- 16** tablespoons unsalted butter (2 sticks), cold

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Line ungreased 9-inch round cake pan with parchment round; set aside.
2. In bowl of standing mixer fitted with paddle attachment, mix flours, all but 1 tablespoon sugar (reserve for sprinkling), and salt at low speed until combined, about 5 seconds. Cut butter into 1/2-inch cubes with 1/4 cup flour mixture on a sheet of parchment paper. Add butter and any remaining flour on parchment to bowl with dry ingredients. Mix on low speed until dough is pale yellow and resembles damp crumbs, about 4 minutes.
3. Remove bowl from mixer and toss mixture lightly with fingers to fluff and loosen; rub any remaining butter bits into flour mixture with fingertips. Follow illustrations 1 through 5 to form and unmold shortbread. Place shortbread in oven; immediately reduce temperature to 300 degrees. Bake 20 minutes; remove baking sheet from oven and follow illustration 6 to score and pierce shortbread. Return shortbread to oven and continue to bake until pale golden, about 40 minutes longer. Slide parchment with shortbread onto cutting board, remove cutter from center, sprinkle shortbread evenly with reserved 1 tablespoon sugar, and cut at scored marks into wedges. Slide parchment with shortbread onto wire rack and cool to room temperature, at least 3 hours. (Can be wrapped well and stored at room temperature up to 7 days.)

STEP-BY-STEP

Shaping Shortbread



1. Turn half of crumbs into 9-inch parchment-lined cake pan and even lightly with fingers. Press heavily with second cake pan.



2. Add remaining crumbs and press as in step 1. Working quickly, smooth top of dough with back of spoon.



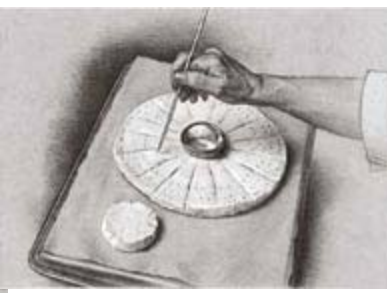
3. Insert paring knife between dough and pan. Leaving knife stationary, rotate pan counterclockwise to free edges of dough.



4. Unmold dough on rimless or inverted baking sheet lined with parchment. Peel parchment round from dough; smooth edges if necessary.



5. Place 2-inch biscuit cutter in center of dough and cut out center. Place extruded round to side, then replace biscuit cutter.



6. After baking 20 minutes, score top surface of shortbread into 16 even wedges with thin knife, then pierce design with skewer.



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