

Classic Nougat

By Batney Desmazery

Nougat isn't difficult to make, but it requires precision and some essential pieces of kitchen kit. You'll need pastry weights or food cans, as well as two 20cm square cake tins that fit inside one another; if you only have one tin, substitute a piece of heavy cardboard cut to fit snugly inside your cake tin and covered in foil. An electric mixer with a whisk attachment and a sugar thermometer are musts, along with a degree of preparedness. It's all about mise en place. Have all your ingredients weighed and ready to go, and your eggwhite on standby in the electric mixer. And be sure to read the recipe tips before you begin.



Ingredients

100g whole blanched almonds
100g peeled pistachios
100g peeled hazelnuts
2 sheets edible rice paper
icing sugar for dusting
150g clear honey (use a floral-flavoured honey for extra flavour)
300g white caster sugar
100g liquid glucose
2 medium egg whites
1 tsp vanilla extract

Method

STEP 1

Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Scatter the nuts over a baking tray and toast in the oven for 10 mins, then set aside (they don't need to cool). Cut the two pieces of rice paper to fit a 20 x 20cm square tin. Line the tin with one sheet of rice paper, brush the sides of the tin with oil, then dust the tin with icing sugar.

STEP 2

Put the honey into a saucepan, then in another saucepan tip in the sugar, glucose and 100ml of water. Put the egg whites in the very clean bowl of a tabletop mixer with a whisk attachment and whisk on a low speed. Heat and boil the honey until it reaches 121C on a digital cooking thermometer, then straightaway pour the honey over the egg whites and set the speed to medium. While the whites and honey are whisking, bring the sugar and water to the boil and keep boiling until the syrup reaches 145C exactly on a digital cooking thermometer. Pour the hot syrup in a slow, steady stream into the beating egg white mixture. Continue beating for about 10 mins until you have a thick, glossy, firm meringue. It's hard to over-whisk at this stage but easy to under-whisk, so keep going until the meringue looks like sticky chewing gum.

STEP 3

Use a spatula to stir though the nuts (which should still be warm), the vanilla extract and a small pinch of salt. Scrape the mixture into the lined tin, then smooth over to spread the mixture out evenly (if you have an offset spatula, now is the time to use it). Finally, top with the remaining sheet of rice paper and press down. Leave the nougat to set for at least 2 hrs or overnight.

STEP 4

To turn out and portion, use a spatula to loosen the edges of the nougat away from the tin, then invert the tin on to a clean board and use a sharp serrated, hot knife to portion into bars or squares. The nougat will keep, stored in an airtight container, for up to a month.

TIPS

A few tricks to lining your tin

Prepare your cake tin by lining it with confectioner's rice paper and oiling or buttering the sides. You can also make life a little easier by lining the tin with a sheet of baking paper before lining the base with rice paper.

If you let the baking paper overhang the sides of the tin, the nougat will be easier to remove from the tin later. Confectioner's rice paper (not to be confused with Asian rice paper used for Vietnamese rice paper rolls) is available from select delicatessens, Middle Eastern grocers and specialist food shops. If it proves difficult to track down, you can still make nougat; use lightly greased baking paper instead (though while confectioner's paper is edible, baking paper will have to be removed). Once all this is done, you're ready to start.

Focus, focus, focus, focus...

From this point it's quite straightforward but focus and timing remain key. Once the honey is whisked into the egg white and the syrup has started cooking, don't walk away: it can be mere seconds between having a syrup that's not quite ready and one that's overcooked. The sugar thermometer is your greatest ally here: watch it like a hawk and you'll have no worries. Once the required temperature is reached, turn your mixer to low speed and pour the syrup down the side of the bowl.

If additional flavours appeal, such as vanilla, rosewater or orange-blossom water, now's the time to add them.

Increase the mixer speed once again and watch a snowy white, glossy mixture take shape. You're almost there now – just stir in the fruit and nuts (a sturdy metal spoon or spatula makes this a lot easier) and tip the mix into your prepared tin. Use a hot palette knife (dip it in hot water then dry it quickly) to press the mixture into the tin, cover it with extra rice paper and then weight it with your extra tin (or cardboard) and some food cans.

Listen to the weatherman

Your nougat should set overnight, but this is weather-dependent – humidity or extreme heat will slow the setting time. Cut it into squares or fingers and store them in an airtight container between sheets of baking paper.

If it's very hot or humid, the nougat will soften, so in these conditions, keep it in the refrigerator and serve it chilled.

This recipe comes from BBC Good Food by Batney Desmazery
Tips from Gourmet Traveller