

Ancient Greco Roman Cheese Honey Cake

Written mention of these cheese honey cakes can be traced back to Aristophanes in the 5th C BCE.

For the filling

Ingredients

4 cups goat or cow ricotta cheese
3 ½ cups white flour
7 eggs
1 tsp. baking soda
1.5 cups of honey
Fresh lavender

Utensils

Measuring cup
Measuring spoons
Knife and cutting board
Rolling pin
Kitchen scale
Small bowl
2 Mixing bowls
Wooden spoon
Rubber spatula
Plastic wrap
Whisk
Pastry brush
Parchment paper
Cake pan
Scissors
Cookie sheet

For the pastry shell

Ingredients

½ cup olive oil
¼ cup honey
1 ¾ cups white flour
1 ¾ cups whole wheat flour
½ cup ice cold water
1 tsp. baking soda

Make the pastry shell first. Using a wooden spoon, combine and mix all of the ingredients for the pastry shell together in a large mixing bowl. The dough should be firm but able to be rolled out into a sheet.

Place the mixing bowl with the dough into the refrigerator and chill for 30 minutes. This will bind the dough.

Make the cheese-filling. In a large mixing bowl, combine 6 eggs, honey, ricotta, baking soda, and flour. Using a rubber spatula, fold and mix all the ingredients together. You can add the lavender at this stage. The amount of lavender is by taste. A small amount will give a faint hint of this floral flavor. The more you add, the stronger presence is in the mix. You can also sprinkle ten to twenty individual seeds on top of each cake prior to baking instead of mixing the lavender into the filling directly. Once the filling is mixed, cover it with plastic wrap and set it aside. Line the cookie sheets with parchment paper. Whisk 1 egg to use as an egg wash. The dish can be prepared up to this point in advance.

Preheat your oven to 400 F°.

Using a food scale, weigh the dough and section it into individual pieces weighing 150 grams. The rule of thumb for this recipe is that 150 grams of dough can contain/support 300-350 grams of filling. Use your scale as you work to make everything come well.

Roll out each section of dough to pie-crust thickness. The dough should be foldable when manipulated but also have the base of it support the filling.

Using a cake pan, or a round plate, cut an even circle in the rolled-out dough. This will form the pastry shell base and sides.

Working with each individually weighed section of dough, spoon 300-350 grams of filling into the center section of each circle of dough. The filling should not be thin and runny. It should sit up like Greek yoghurt once you've spooned it onto the dough.

To mold and fold pastry shell, gently pull up a section of the pastry rim, pinch it gently, and fold it to the left moving clockwise. Repeat every 2 inches as you move around the cake perimeter and secure the filling by creating a circular lip, or pastry rim, around the filling. Place the cakes in the parchment paper lined cookie sheets.

Before baking, dust the top of each of the cakes with some lavender seeds to taste. Ten seeds will give a mild hint of the lavender flavor. If you like a stronger lavender flavor, add up to 20 seeds. Lavender can also be mixed into the dough during the filling preparation.

Place the cookie sheet in the oven and bake the cakes for 30 minutes. At the 30-minute mark, remove the cookie sheet from the oven and brush the pastry gently with the egg wash. After brushing the crust with the egg wash, place the cookie sheet back into the oven and bake for another 5 to 10 minutes until the crust is a dark, golden brown.

When the cakes are golden in color, and the filling is firm to the touch (it does not jiggle in the center and is not tacky to the touch), remove them from the oven and let them stand for one hour to cool. If you're having any trouble getting the cakes off of the cookie sheets, let them cool for several hours. As they come to room temperature, they'll become firmer and you can gently pry them off the cookie sheet with ease.

Serve plain or with a warm honey drizzle, poppy seeds, toasted sesame seeds, and some sweet wine.