



Mostaccioli Calabrese

Sometimes called mustazzoli or mustazzuole, depending on the dialect, these super hard and very simple biscuits are popular at Christmas and often shaped like fish (an ancient symbol of Christianity). They come in many other shapes too, some quite elaborate, including baskets, horses, hearts and a simple S. They are a specialty of the small town of Soriano Calabro where they're often decorated with strips of red, green or silver foil or coloured black by using a very dark caramel in the dough. Some recipes add a little warm wine must to the dough, which may have been traditional when most households made their own wine, as the name likely derives from the Latin word for must. Spices like cinnamon and cloves are optional, but I like the extra dimension they add. The egg wash glaze is also optional, if using it only brush it on for the last couple of minutes of baking or it will burn before the biscuits are cooked. Mostaccioli become very hard once they're cool so take care not to break a tooth! I think they're best softened by dunking in coffee, and some people warm them lightly in a low oven or very briefly in the microwave before eating. They keep for weeks in an airtight container in a cool place.

Makes 10 biscuits

INGREDIENTS

- 135g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon baking powder
- A pinch or 2 ground cinnamon
- A pinch or 2 ground cloves
- 125g honey
- 1 egg yolk, lightly beaten with 1 teaspoon water (optional)



METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 170°C.
2. Place flour, baking powder, cinnamon and cloves in a bowl and whisk to combine well.
3. Make a well in the centre.
4. Warm the honey in a sink of hot water or briefly in the microwave, just long enough to make it runny.
5. Pour it into the flour and mix with a wooden spoon to form a dough.
6. Transfer the dough to a flour-dusted work surface, sprinkle a little more flour over the top and knead lightly, dusting with a little more flour if necessary, until it's no longer sticky.
7. Break into 2 even-sized pieces, roll each one into a thick log then cut each log into five even-sized pieces.
8. Roll each piece into a 1cm thick strip and arrange on a baking paper-lined oven tray in an 'S' shape.
9. Place in the oven for 12–15 minutes, until well-coloured, watching them closely after 12 minutes as they can over-colour quickly. If glazing, after 10 minutes in the oven remove and brush lightly with egg wash then return to the oven for the final few minutes.
10. Remove from oven, transfer to a wire rack and set aside to cool.
11. xx