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Hazelnut Sticks

Makes thirty-six to forty-six 4- or 5-inch sticks

I love the flavor of toasted hazelnuts, but I don't love toasting and skinning them. Here the hazelnuts go into the dough raw and emerge toasted along with the cookies.

INGREDIENTS:

2/3 cup (3.33 ounces) raw hazelnuts
1-1/4 cups (5.625 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
1/2 cup plus 1-1/2 tablespoon (4 ounces) sugar
Slightly rounded 1/4 teaspoon salt
6 tablespoons cold unsalted butter
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
2 tablespoons cold water

EQUIPMENT:

A 5-by-9-inch loaf pan (optional), lined on the bottom and sides with foil
Cookie sheets, lined with parchment paper or greased

By Hand: Finely chop the hazelnuts and transfer them to a large mixing bowl. Whisk in the flour, sugar, and salt. Cut the butter into the flour mixture with a pastry blender or two knives until the butter is reduced to small pieces. With the fingertips of both hands, lightly toss and rub the mixture together until it resembles coarse meal. Combine the vanilla and water in a small pitcher or cup. Stir the flour and butter mixture with a fork while drizzling the water and vanilla into the bowl. Continue to toss and stir lightly with the fork or your fingers until all of the dry ingredients are slightly damp. The dough should remain crumbly and stick together only when pinched.

In a Food Processor: Combine the hazelnuts, flour, sugar, and salt in the food processor and pulse until the hazelnuts are finely chopped. Cut the butter into 1/2-inch cubes and add to the processor. Pulse until the mixture looks like coarse crumbs. Combine the vanilla and water and drizzle them into the processor bowl. Pulse just until the mixture resembles damp crumbs – it should not be a smooth mass, but it should stick together when pressed.

If using a loaf pan, dump the mixture into the lined pan and spread it evenly. Press it very firmly, making a thin layer. Or dump the mixture onto a sheet of foil on a baking sheet and distribute it evenly over an area about 4 by 9 or 10 inches. Press it firmly, squaring up the edges, to make an even compact layer about 1/2 inch thick. Fold the foil over the dough and wrap it tightly. Refrigerate for 2 hours or overnight.

Hazelnut Sticks, (continued)

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven.

Unwrap the dough and transfer it to a cutting board. Use a long sharp knife to cut the dough crosswise into 1/4-inch (or thinner if possible) slices. Use the knife to transfer each slice to the lined or greased cookie sheets, placing the slices 1 inch apart. The slices will be fragile and require the support of the knife in transit; the results will be worth your careful effort.

Bake for 12 to 18 minutes, until the cookies are golden with golden brown edges. Rotate the sheets from top to bottom and from front to back halfway through the baking time to ensure even baking.

For lined pans, set the pans or just the liners on racks to cool; for unlined pans, use a metal spatula to transfer the cookies to racks. Cool the cookies completely before stacking or storing. May be kept in an airtight container for several days.