

Dee's Cheese Date Cookies

My grandmother Dee was widowed when my mother was 12 and raised five daughters on her own. Dee didn't have a lot of time for baking, but when she did bake, it was memorable. These Cheese Date Cookies were the recipe she baked each Thanksgiving, and I can recall as a child everyone gathering around her cookie tray and oogling. The cookies exercised every one of your taste buds! The dates made them sweet and sticky, the pecans crunchy, and the cheddar cheese salty and wonderfully complementary. Dates were a common grocery ingredient when our grandmothers were baking. Today, you don't see them that much in recipes. I look for pitted dates in the produce department where the store stocks dried fruit. You need to finely chop the dates and combine them with finely chopped pecans, and it takes some time, but it can be done a day ahead and set aside, covered, at room temperature. As for dusting the baked cookies with sugar? Completely up to you! I like them both ways!

Makes about 6 dozen (72) cookies

Prep: 25 to 30 minutes

Chill: Overnight

Bake: 15 to 20 minutes

1/2 cup (4 ounces) unsalted butter, at room temperature

8 ounces (2 cups) shredded sharp cheddar cheese

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1/4 teaspoon salt

Filling:

1 pound pitted dates, well chopped

3/4 cup finely chopped pecans

To dust:

1/2 cup confectioners' sugar

1. Place the butter, cheese, flour, and salt in a large mixing bowl, and with an electric mixer blend the mixture until it looks like coarse crumbs. Continue blending or working with your hands until the mixture comes together into a ball. Flatten it out, wrap in plastic and place in the refrigerator overnight.

2. The next day, make the filling by combining the chopped dates and pecans. Set aside. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Remove the dough from the refrigerator, and cut it into two halves. Work with one half at a time. Return the other to the fridge to stay cold.

3. Lightly flour a work surface, and roll the dough out to 1/4-inch thickness. With a knife, cut it into rough 1 1/2-inch squares. Place a teaspoon of filling onto each square. Roll the filling into the dough like a small jellyroll. Press the dough to seal any cracks, and place the cookie on a baking sheet. Bake about 18 at a time until they are golden brown and firm, from 15 to 20 minutes.

4. Remove the cookies from the oven, transfer to a wire rack, and when cool enough to handle dredge in powdered sugar, if desired. Let cool before serving. Repeat with the remaining dough and filling.