

Recipes From Chef Leticia - Toucinho Do Céu

Like many other recipes inherited from Portugal, the origin of Toucinho do Céu goes back hundreds of years to the convents where nuns used to cook sweets based on eggs and sugar and prepare recipes such as pão de ló (genoise cake), flans and custards. At that time, it was almost mandatory for Portuguese ladies to study in convents, where they picked up recipes like this from the nuns. Many of these ladies came to live in Brazil as the wives of the Senhores (who then owned plantations) and brought these recipes with them. The word Toucinho do Céu translates into "bacon-from-heaven" thanks to the traditional version of this recipe being made with pork lard. This lighter version has as much flavor without the fat.



Unlike most almond cakes which starts a creamy batter, this cake is prepared by cooking ground almonds in a simple syrup. The rest is easy, just add eggs and extra yolks and it's done. The result is this very moist almond cake, mostly unknown in the United States. While this makes a great snack, it's especially good as a dessert when paired with rhubarb and strawberry compote and some sweetened crème fraiche. It can also travel well when made in a bar form, like brownies.

Serves 6 to 8 people

- ½ cup water
- 1¼ cups sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1¾ cups (250g) ground almonds, skinless
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus extra for greasing the pan
- 5 egg yolks
- 2 whole eggs
- 1 teaspoon almond extract (or Amaretto)
- 1 teaspoon orange zest, finely grated
- all-purpose flour, for dusting

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Equipment:

8-inch round cake mold

1. Pre-heat the oven to 325°F. Line the cake mold with parchment paper. Grease with butter and dust lightly with flour.
2. Bring the water, sugar and salt to a boil in a big saucepan. Add the ground almonds. Stir gently but constantly, over medium-low heat, until the almond mixture starts to thicken and you can expose the bottom of the pan by stirring, about 2 minutes.
3. Remove the pan from the heat and add the butter. Mix until the butter is melted and blended well.
4. In a medium bowl, lightly whisk the yolks and eggs. Pour into the almond mixture and mix with a spatula. Add the amaretto and orange zest and stir well.
5. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake until the cake is firm in the center and the top is lightly golden brown, about 28 to 30 minutes (if you over bake it, the cake becomes chewy).
6. Inch round cake mold
7. Remove the pan from the oven and cool on a wire rack.
8. After the cake has cooled for about 20 minutes, invert the cake onto a platter. Lift off the pan, peel off the parchment paper, and invert the cake on a serving plate with the topside up. Cut the cake into wedges. Serve at room temperature (if you serve it too hot, the cake will seem overly sweet; too cold and it will not be at the right consistency).

Tip: ground almonds are sold in some supermarkets as almond flour. Feel free to use store-bought, or if you want to make your own, start with blanched almonds (whole, slivered, or sliced) and pulse in the food processor until the almonds are finely ground