

Saffroned Almond Cake

loz-e badam-e yazdi

Makes one ¼ sheet pan (25 diamond-shaped pieces)

Prep: 20 minutes + at least 24 hours in the fridge for it to firm up

Cooking: 10 minutes + setting overnight

SYRUP

2 cups/400g sugar

1 cup/240ml water

½ teaspoon ground saffron dissolved in
¼ cup/60ml pussy willow water/
araq-e bidmeshk or rose water

9 cups (2¼lb/1kg) blanched almond
flour (ground blanched almonds)

GARNISH

2 tablespoons/10g ground pistachios
mixed with 1 teaspoon cardamom
powder or cardamom seeds

I've adapted this recipe from Sara Alavi's mother, Shayesteh Khanum, who is from Yazd. Sara says that in spring her mom would spread almonds on a clean sheet and cover them with pussy willow flowers, leaving them overnight for the perfume of the flowers to infuse the almonds. She can still remember the aroma that filled the whole house. I'm using pussy willow water with the saffron to achieve that aroma.

1. Spray a quarter-sized rimmed sheet pan (9½ x 13in/24 x 33cm) with oil. Line with a sheet of parchment paper and spray evenly with oil on top of the parchment paper.

2. **To make the syrup:** Place the sugar and water in a saucepan, stir well, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 1 minute. Remove from heat, add the saffron and pussy willow water. Stir well. **Allow to cool completely.**

3. Transfer the cooled syrup into a mixing bowl and use a hand-held mixer to beat the syrup for 3 minutes.

4. Add the almond flour gradually to the syrup and mix with a long-handled spoon until you have a thick paste (you can also use an electric mixer).

5. Transfer the almond paste to the lined sheet pan. Place a sheet of oiled parchment paper on top of the almond paste (oil side down) and flatten the paste using your hands over the parchment paper. It should be about 2in/5cm thick. Use a rolling pin over the parchment paper to further flatten and even out the surface; it should be compact and even all over.

6. Place in the fridge (still covered with parchment paper) for at least 24 hours and up to 3 days to firm up the paste.

7. Oil a knife and cut into diamond shapes. Garnish with the pistachios and cardamom mixture. Cover tightly with plastic wrap to prevent drying. Store in the fridge. When you want to transfer to a serving dish, sprinkle a little almond flour over the dish to prevent the almond cake from sticking to it. *Nush-e joon!*

VARIATION

Make the almond past and shape it into 20 balls. Stuff each ball with the ground pistachio and cardamom mixture and roll in powdered sugar.