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Chocolate Amaretti

Amaretti al Cioccolato

Makes 2 to 2 1/2 dozen

Amaretti cookies are chewy and delicious and naturally gluten-free, since only almond paste is used. They are holiday-and-celebration cookies all over Italy. The name “amaretti” stems from the word amaro (“bitter”), because they are traditionally made from bitter almonds or apricot kernels. They can be baked to a hard and crispy texture, or be soft or chewy (hence the wide range of baking times in this recipe), and can be plain or topped with pine nuts or sugar crystals. I love the flavor combination of chocolate and hazelnuts, and I incorporated it into this recipe. They keep well in a cookie tin for a week or more.

14 ounces almond paste

1/2 cup sugar

1/3 cup natural cocoa powder

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

2 large egg whites

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 cup chopped skinned hazelnuts

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment. Break the almond paste into pieces in a food processor, and pulse them to fine crumbs. Add the sugar, cocoa, and salt. Pulse until the mixture is sandy. With the processor running, add the egg whites one at a time, and process to make a smooth, sticky dough. Add the vanilla, and pulse to incorporate. Spread the hazelnuts on a small plate.

Using a small ice-cream scoop, scoop out 1 heaping tablespoon of dough. With wet hands, roll it into a ball, and press the top into the nuts. Repeat with the remaining dough, placing the balls an inch or so apart on the baking sheets. Bake until they're puffed and just set, 16 to 18 minutes for chewy cookies, or 19 to 22 minutes for crisp ones. Remove them to a cooling rack, and cool completely.

#### SHOT LIST

1. Cocoa & toasted hazelnut ingredient beauty
2. Mise
  - a. Almond paste
  - b. Sugar
  - c. Cocoa powder
  - d. Salt
  - e. Two egg whites
  - f. Vanilla
  - g. Chopped skinned hazelnuts
3. In a food processor, almond, sugar, cocoa, salt, egg whites, vanilla

4. Sticky dough, bowl of water, plate of hazelnuts with rolled balls naked and finished
5. OVEN INSERT - raw & baked
6. Baking sheet beauty finished
7. Mound on a platter/plate with espresso