

Winter Warmers

Fennel and Orange Soup, Focaccia Bread, Mincemeat and Almond Tart

Fennel and Orange Soup

Ingredients

- 4 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 onion, sliced
- 2 fennel bulbs, sliced
- Zest and juice of 2 oranges
- 2 pints of vegetable stock
- 1 large potato, peeled and cut into small pieces

Method

- Heat the olive oil in a large pan. Soften chopped onions for a few minutes, then add the chopped fennel pieces, zest and juice of the oranges and potatoes. Cook for a few more minutes.
- Add the vegetable stock, bring to the boil and then simmer for 30 to 40 minutes until softened.
- Blend the soup in a liquidizer. Add seasoning to taste.

Focaccia Bread

Ingredients

- 800gm strong flour
- 3 tsp salt
- 2 sachets of dried yeast (7 gm each)
- 2 or 3 sprigs of rosemary
- 10 tbsp. olive oil
- 15 to 17 fluid ounces of tepid water
- Sea salt

Method

1. Sift the flour and salt into a large mixing bowl. Mix in the dried yeast and 2 sprigs of chopped rosemary. Make a well in the centre and add 5 tbsp. of olive oil. Mix this into the flour with the tepid water, pouring it in slowly to make into a soft dough.
2. Lightly sprinkle a little flour onto the table top. Turn out the dough and knead for ten minutes. Put the dough into an oiled bowl and cover with cling film. Leave to rise in a warm place until doubled in size.
3. Turn out the dough and knead lightly again. Cut in half and press into two oiled 23cm round tins (spring clipped cake tins) and cover with cling film. Leave to rise again for 30 minutes.
4. Pre-heat oven to 200°C (gas mark 7). Make indentations with fingertip all over the top of the bread. Drizzle the remaining olive oil over the top using a pastry brush to spread it to the edges. Push a rosemary leaf into each indentation and sprinkle sea salt over each loaf.
5. Bake for 25 minutes until golden. The bread should sound hollow when you tap it underneath. Transfer to a wire rack to cool.

Mincemeat and Almond Tart

Ingredients

(Pastry)

- 170 gm butter
- 4 tbsp. icing sugar
- 250 gm plain flour
- 2 egg yolks
- Cling film

(Filling)

- 135 gm butter, softened
- 135 gm caster sugar
- 3 eggs
- 135 gm ground almonds
- 1 tsp. almond extract
- 6 tbsp. good quality mincemeat (See recipe below)

(Topping)

- 135 gm icing sugar, sifted
- Juice of half a small lemon
- 1 - 1½ tbsp. water
- 45 gm flaked almonds
- 10 inch loose bottomed flan tin

Method

1. Rub the butter into the flour to make fine crumbs. Mix in the icing sugar. Alternatively do this in a food processor.
2. Beat the egg yolks and mix into the crumb mixture (or use the food processor) to form a soft pliable dough.
3. Wrap in cling film and leave to rest in the fridge for about 15 to 20 minutes.
4. Roll out the pastry and line the flan tin with the pastry. Prick the bottom with a fork. Leave to chill.
5. Cream the butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beat each one well and mix in the ground almonds and almond essence.
6. Spread the mincemeat evenly over the bottom of the pastry. Spread the almond mixture over the mincemeat.
7. Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C (gas mark 4) for approximately 40 minutes until the filling is firm to touch. Cover with foil if it is browning too quickly.
8. To make the topping, stir together the icing sugar, lemon juice and enough water to make a thin glacé icing. Spread evenly over the tart, then sprinkle with the almonds.
9. Return to the oven for 5 minutes or until the icing is shiny. Serve warm or cold.

Recipe for Christmas Mincemeat

Ingredients

- 650gm raisins
- 100gm mixed peel
- 1 kg cooking apples
- 325gm currants
- 225gm sultanas
- 175gm shredded suet
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- 4 tbsp. lemon juice
- Zest of 2 lemons
- 675gm granulated sugar
- 6 tbsp. rum, brandy or sherry

Method

1. Peel, core and chop, then grate the apples. Place everything into a large bowl. Mix thoroughly and leave to stand overnight.
2. Put into freezable containers. This mincemeat needs to be kept in the freezer because of its high apple content. It would only keep for a month in the fridge.