

## Ottolenghi's Sesame, pecan and date cookies



These take their inspiration from maamoul, a date and nut-stuffed butter cookie popular throughout the Middle East. Swap the pecans for any other nuts you have to hand and the fennel seeds for the same amount of anise or half the amount of cardamom. Once baked, the cookies will keep well in a sealed container for up to five days, so they're perfect for making ahead.

Prep 20 min

Cook 25 min

Cool 15 min

Makes 14

100g fine semolina

100g plain flour, and extra for dusting

30g caster sugar

90g unsalted, room-temperature butter, cut into cubes

Fine sea salt

½ tsp vanilla extract

1 lemon, zested, to get 1 tsp, and juiced, to get 2 tsp

100g toasted pecans

3 tbsp toasted sesame seeds, plus 1 ½ tsp extra for sprinkling

10 medjool dates, stones removed (160g net)

2 tsp fennel seeds, toasted and finely ground in a mortar

2 tbsp orange juice

Heat the oven to 180C (160C fan)/350F/gas mark 4. Put the semolina, flour, sugar and butter in a large bowl with an eighth of a

teaspoon of salt. Using the tips of your fingers, rub the mixture to a breadcrumb consistency. Add the vanilla, lemon juice and a teaspoon of water, mix into a pliable dough and set aside.

Put the pecans, sesame seeds, dates, fennel, lemon zest and orange juice in a food processor and blitz to a thick, almost smooth paste.

Put the dough between two sheets of baking paper, then roll it out into a roughly 34cm x 22cm rectangle that's about 3mm thick. Using a spatula, carefully spread the date paste evenly over the dough, then, using the paper to help you, roll it into a log about 6-7cm in diameter.

Brush the top of the log with a little water, scatter on the remaining sesame seeds and use the paper to press the seeds into the top of the dough. Cut the log at an angle into 2cm-thick slices.

Arrange the slices seam side down on a lined baking sheet and with sesame-studded side facing up. Bake for 20-25 minutes, , rotating the cookies once halfway, until slightly golden on top, then remove and leave to cool.