

Pistachio and blood orange cake



This cake is inspired by the foothills of Mount Etna, where I saw pistachio trees and orange trees growing side by side in the volcanic soil. Blood oranges are mellow, fragrant and sweet, and don't have the sharp tang of other citrus fruits. There are several varieties but the delicately flavoured moro has a deeper red flesh and its orange skin is speckled with red. Out of season, you can make this with ordinary oranges.

Serves 8

self-raising flour 175g

baking powder 1½ tsp

salt ¼ tsp

green cardamom pods 4-5 , seeds removed and ground to a powder

pistachio nuts 120g, finely ground

eggs 4

butter 175g

golden caster sugar 175g

blood oranges zest of 3, juice reserved for the syrup (see below)

lemon zest of 1, juice reserved for the syrup (see below)

vanilla extract 1 tsp

soured cream 50g

For the syrup

blood oranges juice of 3 (see above)

lemon juice of 1 (see above)

caster sugar the same amount by weight of sugar to juice

sea salt a pinch

For the sugar glaze (optional)

icing sugar 150g, sifted

blood orange juice 3 tbsp
sea salt a pinch

Butter and line a 20cm round cake tin with baking paper. Preheat the oven to 170C fan/gas mark 5.

Sift the flour, baking powder, salt and ground cardamom into a large bowl, then add the ground pistachios.

Break the eggs into a jug. Stir with a fork until just mixed.

Put the butter, sugar, citrus zests and vanilla in another large bowl if using a hand-held beater or use a stand mixer with a beater attachment. Beat on a medium speed for 6-8 minutes or until pale and fluffy.

Add the eggs in 3 or 4 goes, incorporating well after each.

Fold in alternately the sifted dry ingredients and the soured cream in 3 or 4 goes, until just combined to a smooth batter. Do not overmix.

Pour the batter into the prepared tin. Tap the tin gently on the worktop to release any air pockets. Bake for 35-40 minutes. Test by inserting a skewer: it should come out clean. If it isn't, cover with foil and cook for a further 5-10 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the syrup. Weigh the juice from the fruit, then pour into a small pan over a medium heat. Add an equal weight of sugar and the pinch of salt. Simmer until the sugar dissolves completely and continue to cook for 3-5 minutes until a thin syrup forms – you don't want it to be thick. Remove from the heat and set aside.

When the cake is baked, leave in the tin to cool for 10 minutes. Then poke holes over the surface with a skewer and brush half the syrup over the top.

After 10 minutes, turn out the cake from the tin and place on a wire rack. Brush the remaining syrup on the sides as well.

Once the cake is cold, mix the ingredients for the glaze, if using, to a pouring consistency. Add the juice sparingly: you may not need all of it.