

Shrewsbury Cakes

Original recipe from "A delightful Daily Exercise for Ladies and Gentlewomen" (1623 edition by John Murrell):

"Take a quart of very fine flouwer, eight onces of fine sugar beaten and cersed, twelve ounces sweet butter, nutmeg grated, damaske rosewater- work together with your hands for halfe an houre, then roule in little round cakes about the thickness of three shillings, then take a glasse and cut the cakes, then strow some flower on white papers and bake them in an oven as hotte as for manchet. If the oven be not hotte sett your lid downe (there is a long explanantion for testing/changing the heat in the period oven which i have omitted) until they be baked enough, for they must lokke browne not white. you may keep them halfe a yeare but new baked are best."

(source: <https://bricabrac164.wordpress.com/2019/11/08/guy-fawkes-and-shrewsbury-cakes/>)

My modernized recipe:

1/2 cup flour
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup butter (softened)
1 tsp rose water
1/4 tsp nutmeg

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit
2. Combine Sugar, Butter, and Flour in a mixing bowl and mix well with a fork until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. If the butter is hard you will need to rub it in with your fingertips, like making pastry.
3. If mixture is too wet, add another 1/2 cup flour and mix with fork until it is the right consistency
4. Add the Rosewater and Nutmeg
5. Gather the dough together with your fingers in the bowl
6. Knead lightly
7. On a floured surface, roll out the dough to about half a cm thick (if dough is too soft, put in the fridge for 30 minutes and then roll it out)
8. Use a cookie cutter to cut the "cakes" out
9. Space the "cakes" out on a baking sheet and prick the surface of the "cakes" with a fork to create an elegant design
10. Bake for 10-15 minutes until golden brown (keep a close eye on the "cakes" so they don't burn!)
11. Remove from oven and allow to cool
12. Serve cold
13. They should keep well in an airtight container

Quote:

"Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" - Sir Toby Belch, *Twelfth Night*

Humor

The ancient science suggests that refined sugars were supposed to be a negative influence on individuals with Phlegmatic tendencies, but Shakespeare used the word "sugar" very fondly in his plays and rarely in reference to the four humors. I think this might be because sugar at the time was such a delicacy, it was seen as something to indulge in on special occasions and Shakespeare's characters definitely reflected that viewpoint when referencing sugar and sweets.

Recipe compiled by Emily Schuman