Biscochitos

Makes about 5½ dozen 2-inch cookies

Don't be afraid of the anise in these cookies. I hear a lot of people say they don't care for the flavor of anise seed, but I've yet to meet a person who doesn't like these cookies (the cinnamon sugar topping mellows the anise flavor). Biscochitos are said to be native to New Mexico, where they are traditionally made with lard. The combination of shortening and butter is a good substitute. These cookies are flaky and light, with an ultrathin, crisp crust.

— Lee Posey

- ½ cup vegetable shortening, at room temperature
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ⅔ cup granulated sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 egg yolk
- 2⅔ cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons anise seed, finely ground in a spice grinder and sifted
- ½ teaspoon baking powder

Topping:

- ⅔ cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

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Tip | This dough gets sticky and soft as soon as it warms up, making it a little tricky to roll out. Some people like the trick of rolling the dough between layers of parchment, but I don't think that works very well. I prefer to work with a small amount of dough at a time and simply work quickly – rolling and cutting before it has a chance to warm up. Have your baking sheets and all your tools set up and ready to go before you start. If your dough does warm up, slide it onto a cookie sheet and pop it in the fridge for a few minutes until it is cool and firm again. Use a thin metal spatula to transfer the stars to baking sheets.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream shortening, butter, salt and sugar until light and fluffy. Add egg and egg yolk and beat well. Sift flour, anise seed and baking powder. Add sifted dry ingredients to mixer and mix on low speed until dough comes together. Gather the dough into a ball and flatten it into a disc about 1 inch thick. Wrap the dough in plastic and chill thoroughly — at least one hour or up to two days.

Work with half of the dough at a time. On a lightly floured surface, roll it about ⅛ inch thick and cut with a 2- to 3-inch star-shaped cutter. Transfer stars to cookie sheets as you work, placing them about 1 inch apart. Gather up the dough scraps, chill briefly and reroll. Repeat with remaining dough. Keep the stars chilled while you work. This dough is very tender and is easiest to work with when it is kept cool (see tip, also Rugelach tip). Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

To make topping: Mix the sugar with the cinnamon. Using a pastry or basting brush, brush each cookie with a little cool water to help the cinnamon sugar stick. Sprinkle generously with the cinnamon sugar.

Bake chilled cookies for about 12 minutes, until puffed and barely colored on the edges. Transfer to wire racks to cool. Be careful — these are fragile.