

ROSQUITAS DE ALMENDRAS

MARZIPAN "DOUGHNUTS" WITH ITALIAN MERINGUE GLAZE

This melt-in-your-mouth confection from the 1910 *La verdadera cocina regional* is based on two old Spanish delicacies. Somewhere between a doughnut and a glazed almond cookie, author doña Manuela's Rosquitas de almendras seems to be a fusion of *rosquillas* and *melindres*, both of which feature the "little ring" shape as the name *rosquillas* implies. It is a happy marriage indeed. *Rosquillas* (occasionally *rosquitas*) are, simply put, fried and glazed Spanish doughnuts – sort of a round *churro*. *Melindres*, on the other hand, feature a dough based on a paste of almonds (*almendras*), not unlike marzipan; they are flavored with lemon or orange blossom water (*agua de azahar*); and they are typically glazed with sugar syrup, sweetened egg whites or Italian meringue.

Melindres are still a specialty of Yepes, a town in the province of Toledo, a region long known for its fine almond paste delicacies such as marzipan and tortes. Like any creative cook, doña Manuela mixed and matched for her version of Rosquitas de almendras and used almonds, more like *melindres* than *rosquillas*. I have taken her lead and done my own mix-and-matching: this recipe for "little almond rings" incorporates almonds, sugar, flour and eggs. But being truer to original *rosquillas*, I fry them like doughnuts instead of baking them as she suggests, and finish them with a glaze of Italian meringue scented with star anise.

YIELD: APPROXIMATELY 2 DOZEN

Prepare ahead note: *Rosquitas de almendras* need to be made at least 6 hours in advance and allowed to dry. After coating with the frosting, they will last 2-3 weeks in an airtight container stored in a cool, dry place.

- 1 cup (175g) almonds, blanched
- ½ cup (60g) powdered sugar
- ¼ cup (56g) Enriched Lard
- 1 tsp. (2.5 ml) almond extract
- 2 cups (250g) flour
- 3 eggs

- Vegetable oil for frying

PREPARE THE ALMOND PASTE

STEP 1 PLACE THE BLANCHED ALMONDS

and powdered sugar in a food processor; process until the pulverized nuts begin clumping on the sides of the bowl. Add the lard and almond extract and continue processing until the mixture begins to form a smooth paste, 3-4 minutes. Scrape the sides of the bowl with a spatula as needed.

FORM THE ROSQUITAS

STEP 2 ADD THE FLOUR to the processor bowl and process until well incorporated; the mixture should appear like fine meal. Separate one of the eggs and reserve the white. Add the yolk and the remaining eggs to the processor, and process until the dough clumps into a ball, about 30 seconds. (If too dry, add a few drops of water until it is pliable like pie crust dough). Remove dough from bowl, and form into balls approximately 1½ inches (4cm) in diameter (1 oz. / 25 g). Place one ball on a large plate or baking sheet; push a hole through the center with your index finger, and lightly reshape the exterior into a small doughnut form. Continue forming the rest of the "doughnuts."

FRY THE ROSQUITAS

STEP 3 POUR 2 INCHES (5CM) OF OIL into a heavy, deep skillet. Heat the oil until it reaches 360°F (182°C). Working in small batches, fry the Rosquitas until golden brown, about 30 seconds per side; check frequently because these tend to burn quickly due to the sugar content. Remove and drain on paper towels.

ROSQUITAS DE ALMENDRAS (CONT'D)

- **1¼ cup (250g) sugar**
- **1 cup (250ml) water**
- **2 whole star anise (about 3 g)**
- **1 reserved egg white (see Step 2)**

✧ PREPARE THE MERINGUE & FINISH ✧

STEP 4 MIX SUGAR AND WATER in a small saucepan; add star anise and place over high heat, simmering until sugar dissolves. Meanwhile, in a stand mixer or with a handheld electric mixer, beat the remaining egg white in a large bowl until it forms stiff peaks. When the sugar syrup reaches the soft ball stage at 238°F (114°C) on a candy thermometer, remove from heat and extract the star anise; discard. Slowly drizzle the syrup in a thin stream into the egg white as you continue beating on high. Continue until the mixture just begins to thicken and is satiny and shiny, about one minute. *Do not over beat.*

STEP 5 WORKING QUICKLY BEFORE THE MERINGUE HARDENS, lift one Rosquita with the handle of a wooden spoon, or between your thumb and index finger, and roll it like a wheel through the meringue mixture to coat on all sides. Place on waxed paper to dry and harden. Continue with the rest. Allow to dry 6-8 hours uncovered or until the coating has hardened, then store in an airtight container.