

Wednesday, December 9, 2015 The Forum Section B

VARIETY



The recipe for Danish Almond Puffs is from Betty Crocker and made its debut in 1969.

Photos by Michael Vosburg / Forum Photo Editor

Puff gets stamp of approval

Pastry light and fluffy in texture, heavenly in taste

I just love the holiday baking season. From Black Friday through the new year, Gio, our 11-year-old son, and I make something different nearly every day. We enjoy dishes that celebrate our heritage, like Norwegian krumkake and Italian almond sweets, as well as classic favorites like peppermint bark, peanut butter cups and sugar cookie cut-outs.

Each year presents an opportunity to find a new favorite, like our recently featured LaFalm Family Belgian lukken cookies, or revisit an old one, like today's Almond Danish Puff recipe.

I began making Danish puff in 1978 when I was 8 years old. I remember this well because that fall I had joined the new stamp club at St. Anthony's grade school, which was organized and facilitated by Fred Colby of Fargo.

Mr. Colby, who passed away in 1965, was a retired attorney and member of St. Anthony's parish, and he was also an enthusiastic philatelist (stamp collector).

About a dozen of us signed up to join Mr. Colby's stamp club, and we met once a week to pore over his vast collection of rare and special stamps as he pointed out what made each one special. We kids quickly grew to cherish these weekly gatherings, and Mr. Colby always made sure to bring a special treat

to share with the club. When Christmas came around, I decided that I wanted to bring a special treat of my own to Mr. Colby and his family. My mom suggested a Danish puff, which she made every season for our family. I never cease to be amazed by the Scandinavians' marvelous ability to turn butter, flour and sugar into so many different and delicious pastries.

Danish puff was a perfect choice for my mission. This pastry is lovely in appearance, light and fluffy in texture, and heavenly in taste. Danish puff can be served as a dessert or

midday treat, or as an elegant addition to your holiday brunch table or buffet.

The recipe is from Betty Crocker and made its debut in 1969, which would explain why it doesn't appear in my 1950 first-edition copy. This double-textured pastry has a crispy bottom layer similar in style and flavor to shortbread, while the top layer, a choux pastry (or pâte à choux), is light and airy just like a cream puff. The recipe yields two puffs, which are about 12 inches long and 3 inches wide, making it ideal for holiday gift giving.

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Almond Danish Puff

(Lightly adapted from the Betty Crocker recipe)

Bottom pastry ingredients

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 2 tablespoons water

Choux pastry topping

- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon almond extract

Vanilla icing

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract (optional)

- 1 to 2 tablespoons warm water or milk
- 1/2 cup sliced almonds, toasted

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Bottom pastry layer

Place 1 cup flour in a medium bowl and use a pastry blender to cut in 1/2 cup softened butter (or pull 2 table knives through ingredients in opposite directions), until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons water over mixture and toss with a fork until well combined.

Evenly spread the dough until I reach the desired size. The choux pastry is divided in half and spread evenly with a rubber spatula over each pastry. The puffs bake for about an hour until golden brown. Once they have cooled, a layer of icing is added, topped by a generous

Gather the pastry into a ball and divide in half. On an ungreased baking sheet, use your hands to pat each half into a 12-by-3-inch rectangle, about 3 inches apart.

Choux pastry topping

In a saucepan over medium heat, combine 1/2 cup butter with 1 cup water and bring to a rolling boil, remove from heat and use a wooden spoon to quickly stir in almond extract and 1 cup flour. Stir vigorously over low heat for about 1 minute, or until mixture forms a ball; remove from heat. Add eggs, one at a time, and beat by hand until

smooth. Spread half of the topping over each pastry rectangle. Bake for 1 hour or until topping is crisp and golden brown; transfer puffs from pan to cooling rack and cool completely.

Vanilla icing

In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients except almonds until smooth and spreadable; adjust ingredients until desired consistency is achieved. Spread over top of each cooled pastry, and sprinkle generously with toasted almond slices. Slice on the bias, serve and enjoy.

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and friends, and it always receives their stamp of approval.

"Home With the Last Italian" is a weekly column written by Sarah Nasello featuring recipes by her husband, Tony Nasello. The couple owns Sarah's in Moorhead and lives in Fargo with their 11-year-old son, Giovanni. Readers can reach them at dine@sarahs.com. All previous columns can be found at <http://thelastitalian.areavoices.com>.