

Palets de Dames, Lille Style

Makes about 40 cookies

The word palet means “puck,” and you find it used most often by chocolatiers, who make pucks of ganache and enrobe them in chocolate. But the only thing puckish about these cookies is their adorableness. With wide, flat uppers iced in white, and rounded bottoms, they look like toy tops or open parasols. I saw these cookies in all sizes in every pâtisserie I visited in Lille, the northern French city that borders Belgium. Then I saw them finished with melted rose pralines, the red candies that are the sweet symbol of Lyon, the gastronomic capital of the Rhône-Alpes region. And everywhere I saw them, I bought them—the combination of cakeish cookie and sweet icing is irresistible.

While a plain icing made with confectioners’ sugar is the tradition in Lille, there’s no reason not to have a little fun with these. Think about adding food coloring to the icing or dividing the icing and creating a few tints. And to make these already festive cookies even more so, you can speckle the still-wet glaze with sanding sugar.

For the cookies

9 tablespoons (4½ ounces; 128 grams) unsalted butter, at room temperature

2/3 cup (132 grams) sugar

Pinch of fine sea salt

2 large eggs, at room temperature

¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1¼ cups (170 grams) all-purpose flour

For the icing

1 cup (120 grams) confectioners’ sugar, sifted

About 1½ tablespoons whole milk

A few drops of freshly squeezed lemon juice

To make the cookies:

~ Working in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, or in a large bowl with a hand mixer, beat the butter on medium speed until smooth and creamy. Add the sugar and salt and beat for another 2 to 3 minutes, until the mixture is again smooth and creamy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating for 1 minute after each egg goes in. Don’t be discouraged if the mixture curdles; it will be fine as soon as you add the flour.

~ Beat in the vanilla extract. Reduce the mixer speed to low and add the flour in 3 additions, mixing only until it disappears after each addition. You'll have a very soft dough that might look more like a cake batter than a cookie dough.

~ Scrape the dough into a bowl, press a piece of plastic film against the surface to create an airtight seal and chill the dough for at least 1 hour, or until it is firm. (The dough can be wrapped airtight and kept in the refrigerator for up to 2 days.)

~ When you're ready to bake: Center a rack in the oven and preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat.

~ You need about 2 teaspoons of dough for each cookie. You can use a small (2-teaspoon capacity) cookie scoop—my favorite tool for this job—or you can use a spoon to scoop out rounded teaspoonfuls of dough, in which case it's best to roll the dough gently between your palms to form balls. Place the scoops or balls of dough about 2 inches apart on the baking sheet.

~ Bake for 7 to 9 minutes, or until the cookies are set and just slightly brown around the edges. Carefully transfer the cookies to a rack and allow them to cool to room temperature. Repeat with the remaining dough, cooling the baking sheet between batches.

~ To make the icing: Put the confectioners' sugar in a wide bowl and add 1 tablespoon milk and the lemon juice. Using a small whisk or a fork, stir until you have a smooth icing that forms a ribbon when the whisk or fork is lifted. If the icing is too thick to flow smoothly, add more milk; you might need even more than 1½ tablespoons milk total, in which case it's best to add the additional milk in nano-driplets.

~ One by one, pick up the cookies and dip one side into the icing, then lift the cookie up and give it a little twirl, so that the excess icing falls back into the bowl. Put the cookie icing side up on a rack and let the icing dry and firm at room temperature.

Serving: A cup of coffee, a palet de dames and la vie est belle.

Storing: Once the icing is dry, the cookies can be put in a covered container; they'll keep for up to 3 days at room temperature. Because of the icing, the finished cookies can't be frozen. However, if you'd like, you can pack the undipped cookies airtight and freeze them for up to 2 months; defrost and then ice them.