

Mincemeat Tartlets

I saw [a version of this recipe](#) on Nigella Lawson's *Nigella's Christmas Kitchen* and thought I'd make them and send them off, far and wide, to distant relatives for the holidays. In the end, though, they're really just too fragile for shipping, so only my local loved-ones will get these from me, but I may make little turnovers using more traditional pie crust, filled with the "mincemeat," which I hope will end up being a bit more durable. I may update this entry after I've made a batch.

First, the "mincemeat," which I put in quotes because it's really not. It's more like a spicy, boozy cranberry/orange chutney. Mincemeat, traditionally, has some in common with this mixture, like raisins and currents and booze, but it also usually has lard in it. This one is, as advertised, a much lighter version.

2½ oz brown sugar
2fl oz ruby port
1 tablespoon molasses
12oz fresh cranberries (1 package)
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground cloves
2½ oz raisins
2½ oz dried cherries
1 oz dried cranberries
1 navel orange, zest & juice
1fl oz brandy
few drops almond extract
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
2 tablespoons honey

In a medium saucepan, melt the brown sugar in the port wine over low heat. Stir in the cranberries. Add all of the spices, the dried fruit, and the zest and juice from the

orange, and bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 20 minutes. The pectin in the cranberries will quickly thicken the sauce. Stir occasionally and cook until all of the fresh cranberries have popped – which might need a little coaxing by pressing them against the side of the pot with a wooden spoon. Once everything has broken down, remove from the heat, and let it cool down a little before adding the rest of the ingredients. (If the mixture is too hot, you'll evaporate all the alcohol in the extracts and the brandy, along with all of their flavor, too.) Stir the mixture until everything is pretty much broken down into a chunky jam. From there, you can store the mixture in your refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

So while I was amassing the ingredients for all of this, I was completely shocked at the price of whole cloves. The store I was shopping in wanted \$11 for a 1.25 ounce jar. With all of the dried fruit, extract, and booze in this recipe, it's definitely something you'll want to save for the holidays. I ended up buying enough to make 3 batches, and I think I easily spent \$60 on the ingredients.

Nigella's program showed her using this mincemeat in little tartlets she made using small muffin trays, lining each with a layer of shortbread dough, and topping each with a shortbread star. I tried following [her recipe](#) from both the television show and the web (which were identical), but the quantities given were given in metric. I believe I converted them correctly into standard measurements. Her recipe called for equal parts butter and vegetable shortening, along with flour, a dash of salt, and fresh orange juice. I deviated slightly, by also including the zest of the orange as well. In the end, the results were awful, and I don't think I can blame the zest. The cooked dough was way too dry and crumbly, to the point that I couldn't even swallow it.

I searched on the net for a standard shortbread recipe, and came up with this decent one.

1 cup **butter**, softened (2 sticks)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup **confectioner's sugar**

2 cups **flour**

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon **baking powder**

Cream the butter and sugar together in a mixing bowl. Add the flour and the baking powder and mix until it forms a ball. Wrap in plastic and form it into a disk and chill in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes, enough time to preheat your oven to 350°. Roll it out to a thickness of a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, and cut 2 inch circles. Line each cup of a mini-muffin pan with the circles, and fill each cup with a spoonful of the cranberry mincemeat. Top with some of the leftover shortbread – you could do as Nigella did and cut little stars, but I didn't have a star-shaped cookie cutter, so I just cut little strips of shortbread, 4 strips to a tartlet, and made little latticework, just like you might do with a pie. Put these in the middle of the preheated oven, and cook for 12-15 minutes, or until the shortbread starts to turn golden brown.