

Honey Balls

Struffoli

“Lidia's Italian-American Kitchen”

By Lidia Matticchio Bastianich

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Ingredients

For the dough:

4 cups all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon sugar

Grated zest of half a lemon

Grated zest of half an orange

Pinch of salt

4 large eggs

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

1 teaspoon grappa, rum or vanilla

3 cups vegetable oil for frying

For the honey syrup:

2 cups honey

½ cup sugar

1/3 cup water

¼ cup small colored sprinkles

Stir the flour, sugar, lemon and orange zest and salt together in a bowl and turn it out onto a clean work surface. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and add the eggs, butter and grappa to it. With your fingertips, work the eggs, butter and grappa together until more or less blended, then begin working in the dry ingredients. Continue working the dough until it is smooth and evenly blended. Gather the dough together into a ball, wipe the dough from your hands and add it to the dough ball. Clean your hands and the work surface, flour both lightly and knead the dough until smooth, 3 to 4 minutes. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and let stand at room temperature 1 hour.

Pull off a plum size piece of the dough and roll it out with your palms and fingers to a rope about 1/3 inch in diameter. Repeat with the remaining dough. Cut the dough ropes crosswise into 1/3-inch lengths. Roll the pieces of dough between your hands into balls.

Pour the oil into a wide, deep skillet or braising pan and heat over medium heat until a deep-frying thermometer registers 350° degrees F or a dough ball gives off a lively sizzle when slipped into the oil. Carefully slide about one-fourth of the dough balls into the oil and fry, turning and immersing them with a wire skimmer or slotted spoon, until golden brown on all sides, about 4 minutes. Transfer them with the skimmer to a paper towel-lined baking sheet to drain, first allowing any excess oil to drip back into the pan. Repeat with the remaining dough balls, allowing the oil to return to the correct temperature before frying the next batch.

Have a bowl of cold water and a serving plate large enough to hold the finished struffoli (about 12 inches in diameter) close by. Stir the honey, sugar and water together in a heavy wide pot large enough to hold all the dough balls over low heat until the sugar is dissolved. Increase the heat to high and bring the syrup to a boil. The syrup will foam up dramatically when it comes to a boil. Continue cooking until the foam dies down and the mixture becomes just a shade darker [ok?], about 4 minutes. Remove from the heat and immediately add all the fried dough balls. Toss them in the syrup with a wire skimmer until they are coated. Remove the dough balls from the syrup with the skimmer, allowing excess syrup to drip back into the pan first, and mound them on the serving plate like a pyramid, helping yourself with your hands from time to time, after dipping them into the cold water to protect them.

Scatter the sprinkles over the mound of struffoli until it is colorful. You may serve them the same day, however it also keeps well for several days covered loosely with plastic wrap.

Donna's Notes: I made a double batch of dough and half a recipe of the honey syrup and had plenty of honey to cover the struffoli.