

alfajores

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Alfajores

Two cornstarch shortbread discs sandwiched with dulce de leche and rolled in coconut. The name is Arabic — *al-hasú*, the filled one — and the cookie travelled from al-Andalus to Spain and then to the Southern Cone, where Argentina and Peru made it a national object rather than a Christmas one.

What makes the Rioplatense version distinct is the starch. Up to half the flour is [cornstarch](#), which has no protein at all, and the resulting biscuit dissolves rather than crumbles.

What makes it work

- **Cornstarch is doing the work, not the butter.** At a 1 : 1 ratio with flour the dough has almost no [gluten](#) to develop, so it cannot go tough — but it also has no strength, so the discs must be thick enough to lift.
- **Sift the starch twice.** It lumps, and a lump bakes into a chalky spot.
- **Bake at a low temperature and stop before colour.** These want 165 °C, not the usual 175. A browned alfajor tastes of nothing but toast.
- **Dulce de leche must be the thick, pastry-grade kind** (*repostero*). Loose caramel sauce squeezes out of the sandwich and softens the discs to paste within hours.
- **Chill the assembled cookie for an hour**, then roll the exposed filling in desiccated coconut so it sticks in a clean band.

Ingredients

Makes about 20 sandwiches.

- 200 g [cornstarch](#)
- 150 g all-purpose flour
- 5 g baking powder
- 2 g baking soda
- 150 g unsalted butter, softened
- 100 g granulated sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- 1 tbsp brandy or pisco
- zest of 1 [lemon](#)
- 1 tsp vanilla — see [Pure vanilla extract](#)
- 400 g thick dulce de leche
- 100 g desiccated [coconut](#)

Method

Sift the cornstarch, flour, baking powder and soda together twice.

Cream the butter and sugar three minutes, add the yolks one at a time, then the brandy, zest and vanilla. Fold in the dry mixture. The dough is soft and sticky; wrap and chill it for an hour.

Roll to 8 mm between two sheets of parchment — this dough tears if you flour the bench and work it directly — and cut 4 cm rounds. Bake **165 °C / 325 °F for 10–12 minutes**. They should stay pale, puff slightly, and look matte.

Cool completely. Pipe or spoon about 15 g of dulce de leche onto half the discs, top with the rest, and press gently until the filling reaches the edge. Chill an hour, then roll the rim through coconut.

Notes

- **Make your own dulce de leche** by simmering a tin of sweetened condensed milk fully submerged in

water for three hours, or by baking the contents covered in a bain-marie at 200 °C for 90 minutes, whisking smooth at the end. A tin boiled dry explodes; keep it under water the whole time.

- The Peruvian version skips the coconut and dusts the top with powdered sugar.
- **They improve overnight.** Moisture equalises between filling and biscuit and the texture goes from sandy to melting. Best on day two, good for five days.

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