

kourabiedes

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Kourabiedes

The Greek Christmas and wedding cookie: a very short almond butter biscuit, buried in powdered sugar and often scented with brandy or mastic. A whole clove is pressed into the top of each — an old symbol of the spices brought to the infant Christ, and a signal to remove it before eating that almost nobody follows.

It is the same family as [russian tea cakes](#) and the Spanish *polvorones*, and the differences are instructive.

What makes it work

- **Clarified butter, and a lot of it.** The traditional recipe uses far more butter than a shortbread and clarifies it first. Greek bakers whip the clarified butter alone for ten minutes before anything else goes in, until it is white and doubled — that whipping is the only leavening.
- **Brandy or ouzo**, a tablespoon or two. Alcohol evaporates fast in the oven and leaves the crumb more open.
- **Bury them in sugar while hot, and again cold.** A proper kourabies is served in a drift of powdered sugar, not merely dusted with it. Traditionally they are laid on a sugared tray, covered in more, and left overnight.
- **Bake pale, at 160 °C.** Any browning fights the white.

Ingredients

Makes about 36.

- 350 g clarified butter, softened to a paste
- 100 g powdered sugar
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tbsp brandy, ouzo or Metaxa
- 1 tsp vanilla — see [Pure vanilla extract](#)
- 550 g all-purpose flour
- 5 g baking powder
- 3 g fine salt
- 200 g [almonds](#), toasted and chopped
- 36 whole cloves, optional
- 400 g powdered sugar, for burying

Method

Whip the clarified butter alone at high speed for a full ten minutes, until it is white and looks like frosting. This step is the recipe.

Add the 100 g of powdered sugar and whip two minutes more, then the yolk, brandy and vanilla.

Fold in the flour, baking powder, salt and almonds by hand to a soft dough.

Shape 25 g pieces into crescents or domes, press a clove into each, and bake **160 °C / 325 °F for 20–22 minutes**. They should stay ivory.

Sift a thick layer of powdered sugar over a tray. Lay the hot cookies on it, sift more sugar over until they disappear, and leave overnight.

Notes

- **Melomakarona are the other half of a Greek Christmas tray** — honey-syrup cookies, dark and wet, deliberately opposite in every way. Most households make both. See [melomakarona](#).
- Mastic, a resin from Chios, is the traditional aromatic where brandy is not used; a quarter teaspoon ground with sugar is enough.

- **Keeps a month.** Re-bury in sugar before serving.

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