

nankhatai

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Nankhatai

A South Asian shortbread of ghee, sugar, flour and semolina, cracked on top and scented with cardamom. The name is Persian and Afghan in origin — *naan* bread and *khatai* biscuit — and the cookie is usually traced to Surat in the seventeenth century, where Dutch bakers' leftover dough was sold on to local bakers who reworked it into something that needed no eggs.

Eggless is not a modern adaptation here. It is the original.

What makes it work

- **Ghee, at room temperature, whipped with the sugar until pale.** Ghee is pure fat with no water at all, so the crumb is shorter than butter can make it and the flavour is nutty rather than creamy. See [baking fats](#).
- **Powdered sugar, not granulated.** Granulated sugar will not dissolve in a waterless dough and the baked cookie is gritty.
- **Semolina and gram flour are the texture.** Fine semolina gives the sandy break; a little besan (gram flour) gives the characteristic savoury depth.
- **Rest the dough 20 minutes** so the semolina hydrates on the ghee.
- **Low and slow: 160 °C for 18–20 minutes.** They should crack on top and stay pale. The crack is the sign the surface set before the inside finished expanding.

Ingredients

Makes about 24.

- 200 g ghee, soft but not melted
- 150 g powdered sugar
- 200 g all-purpose flour
- 60 g fine semolina
- 40 g gram flour (besan), optional but traditional
- 3 g baking powder
- 2 g fine salt
- 1 tsp ground green cardamom
- 2 tbsp [milk](#), if needed
- pistachios or [almonds](#), slivered, to top

Method

Beat the ghee and powdered sugar together for four minutes, until pale and fluffy — this is the only air the cookie gets.

Sift in the flour, semolina, gram flour, baking powder, salt and cardamom. Bring it together into a soft dough; add milk only if it will not hold.

Rest 20 minutes. Roll 25 g balls, flatten very slightly, and press a sliver of nut into the top of each.

Bake **160 °C / 325 °F for 18–20 minutes**. They should crack on top and remain pale — the bottoms will be barely gold.

Leave them on the tray ten minutes; they are extremely fragile hot.

Notes

- **Saffron, nutmeg or rose water** are all traditional alternates to the cardamom; see [expensive spices](#).
- If the tops do not crack, the oven is too cool or the dough had too much liquid.
- **Keeps three weeks** in an airtight tin. This is a cookie built for the festival tin, and it is at its best after

two days.

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