King for a day : Dreikönigskuchen

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Dreikönigskuchen

The "Dreikönigskuchen" (Three King's Cake) is a sweet dough bread that celebrates Three Kings Day on January 6th. There are various types of Dreikönigskuchen found throughout Switzerland.

All have a little something "hidden" inside – either a white plastic king figure or a one or two Franc piece of change. The person who finds this piece is then "King for the Day", mostly meaning no washing dishes, cleaning up, or doing chores especially for the younger and older family members.

In Switzerland, small dough rounds are formed flower-like around a bigger piece in the centre. Then they are covered with raw sugar, apricot jam and roasted almonds, and filled with lots of raisins and/or chocolate pieces. The aroma of citrus from orange and lemon rind gives it the taste of a soft brioche.

The legend of the Dreikönigskuchen

Long before the Christian world celebrated January 6th, it already had a special meaning: The end of the winter and the beginning of a New Year in more southern climates, when plants began to bloom. Winter ghosts were scared away and the house purified with the smell of incense.

In many parts of Europe, January 6th was celebrated as the beginning of a new year until 1691, when Pope Innocent XII changed it to January 1st.

The Romans also celebrated one week of festivities in the name of the God Saturnus before the sowing season started on January 6th.

At this time, the tradition started that one of the poor dwellers of the town could be crowned King for a day, at which time even the Emperor bowed and let it happen. The custom also took hold in other parts of Europe and was celebrated with the baking of bread with a bean hidden inside. This would bring the finder good luck throughout the year, and made him the "Bohnenkönig" (Bean King ☺) for a day.

Later, the Catholic Church married this custom up with the story of the Three Kings (the three magi) visiting Bethlehem and Baby Jesus being born. This would be celebrated with bread being divided amongst all citizens, now symbolised with the king hidden inside. Whatever the history, whatever the story, here is my favourite recipe! Easy to do, and definitely better than the over 500,000 cakes sold by the Migros annually or the 250,000 sold by Coop in Switzerland! Now that's what you call tradition!

Ingredients

- 80g honey
- 100g butter
- 60g sliced almonds
- 1 egg yolk
- 10 g vanilla sugar (or 1 tsp artificial vanilla)

Put all five ingredients in a bowl and mix thoroughly until fluffy.

In a second bowl mix together:

- 200 ml milk
- 420 g flour
- 1 fresh yeast package (42g)
- 1 tsp salt

to a crumbly consistence. Add the grated rind of:

- 1 orange
- 1 lemon

and a dash of cinnamon to the dough mixture. Now add the first honey-mixture. Knead until the texture is smooth (5 minutes is best!). Add:

- 100g light coloured and
- 100g dark raisins, and knead again well.

Raisins can be substituted with chocolate pieces (a half and half combination is worth a try). Put them in the freezer for a few minutes first so they don't melt during the kneading process. Cover and let rise for 15 minutes. Punch down softly to let air escape, then let rise a further 15 minutes.
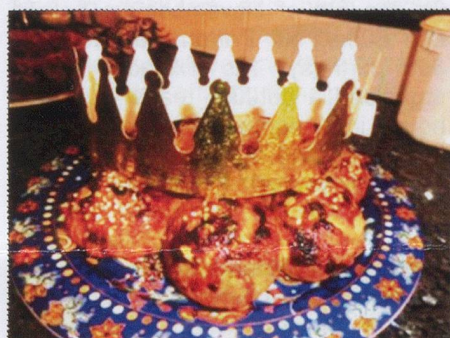
Depending on how many little buns you want around the cake, make one large piece for the middle and then equally sized small pieces around it. Six to eight are ideal. Don't forget to hide the king, a bean or piece of change in one dough!!

Brush with egg yolk and put in fridge for 30 minutes. In the meantime, preheat oven to 200°C. Put cake in oven, turning down to 160°C, and bake for 40 minutes.

Enjoy!

The "Swiss Way" to eat this is with a good cheese selection, cold cuts, butter, jam and hot chocolate! Breakfast, lunch OR supper time! The fun part starts when the family tries to guess where the king is "hidden" – and the King for the day is the person that finds him hidden in their piece of bread (cake!).

By Melissa Lanz