

Cleo Coyle's Shamrock Pistachio Muffins (with Ricotta!)

Recipe text and photos (c) 2010 by Alice Alfonsi who writes the *Coffeehouse Mysteries* as Cleo Coyle with her husband Marc Cerasini

Makes 12 muffins

Ingredients

10 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
1-1/2 cups sugar
2 large eggs
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1/3 cup milk (*whole or reduced fat*)
1 cup ricotta (*whole milk or part-skim*)
1/4 teaspoon salt
1-3/4 cups all-purpose flour (**very important - measure after sifting**)
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 cup whole pistachios (*measure after removing shells*)
1 teaspoon green food coloring (*optional for shamrock shade*)

Directions

Step 1 – Prepare pistachios: Remove the shells by hand and measure out 1 cup of whole pistachios. I use natural, dry roasted California pistachios, which are available in most grocery stores. Roughly chop 1/2 cup of them (just place in plastic bag and bang away with a meat hammer or another fun smashing device). The final 1/2 cup of whole pistachios must be *ground finely* using a food processor or blade grinder. **See my tips at the end of this recipe for getting the best results on this.*

Step 2 – Make batter: Using an electric mixer, beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Blend in the eggs, vanilla, milk, ricotta, and salt. Add sifted flour, baking powder, and the *finely ground* and *roughly chopped* pistachios from Step 1. Blend all ingredients only enough to make a smooth batter.

Optional: To make your muffins “wear the green” for St. Patrick’s Day, add 1 teaspoon of green food coloring when adding the final ingredients to your batter. This will turn the batter an emerald green shamrock shade.

NOTE: Do not over-mix at this stage or you will develop gluten and toughen your muffins. Be especially careful with adding food coloring. Resist the urge to play with the dough’s shade. Every time you work that batter, you are toughening it up. Add the food coloring once and let it go!



Step 3 – Prepare muffin pan and fill cups:

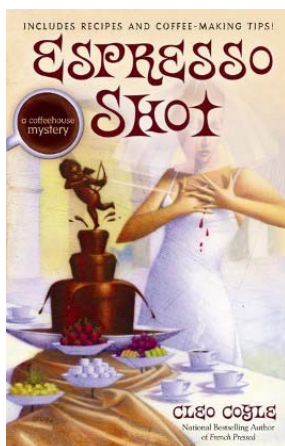
Preheat oven to 375° F. Line muffin cups with paper holders. Fill each muffin cup to the very top with batter. This will give you a nice, rounded muffin top. You can bake the muffins naked or add a sprinkling of some roughly chopped pistachios.

(See photo right) I topped this batch of muffins with a sprinkling of roughly chopped pistachios but these muffins are just as good with plain tops. Plain tops also make it easier to slather butter or cream cheese on your muffins while still warm. If you want to try something deliciously decadent, finish the baked and cooled pistachio muffins with cream cheese frosting.



Step 4 - Bake and cool: Bake the muffins about 25 minutes. Muffins are done when a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean (with no batter on it). Allow pan to cool for a few minutes and transfer the muffins to a cooling rack. Do not allow muffins to stay in the hot pan or the bottoms may steam and become tough.

***TIPS ON GRINDING NUTS:** When a recipe asks you to finely grind nuts, you are creating a “nut flour,” which can give a lovely flavor to any dough or batter. But be careful not to ruin that wonderful flavor by over grinding. Make sure to pulse the grinder or food processor, running it in short bursts. And be sure to stop the grinder as soon as the nuts are pulverized. Why do this? Grinding without pause will create a high RPM on the blades and the friction will overheat the nuts and burn them, imparting a scorched taste to your finished product. If you over-grind, you’re facing the same issue. So pulse, baby, pulse. Do not over grind, and...



Eat with Joy!

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