

ITALIAN BISCOTTI

This is an old Italian family recipe handed down by my grandma, Lena Lapetina. This is a traditional Italian cookie that my grandma usually made during Easter, Christmas and for weddings, which is why you will also hear them referred to as Italian Easter cookies, Italian Christmas cookies, etc. They are slightly dry and not too sweet and go well with coffee, hot chocolate or tea. They are not like the ones you see in the jars at chain coffee shops. My grandma's parents came over from Italy and she was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri, and yes, she is from Kansas City's Lapetina Funeral Home family. For many years, she was a cook at the famous Italian Gardens restaurant at 1110 Baltimore Ave. Sadly, as the downtown area struggled, the DiCapo family was forced to close the restaurant in December 2003 after 78 years in business. Unfortunately, this historic landmark no longer exists and a parking garage took its place.

Besides some distant cousins and with my Mom's recent passing, only I remain and, to my knowledge, I'm the only one who has this recipe and keeps the tradition going. I have held on to it for many years, but now I feel the need to pass it on to those whom I hope will enjoy it. I would greatly appreciate it if you would keep it exactly as it is, including this paragraph, to honor and in remembrance of my grandma and the Lapetina family name. Thank you. If you would like to see pictures my grandma and read about the Italian Gardens, Carl DiCapo wrote a book about the restaurant entitled: *Italian Gardens: A History of Kansas City Through Its Favorite Restaurant* - [available on Amazon.com here](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0692010092)¹.

This is traditional fare for Italians on Easter morning along with Patella (Italian Ham Pie) and that recipe is also on this website.

Fair warning: This recipe is a VERY labor-intensive, time and space-consuming recipe. It will take you the better part of a day to complete a full recipe, but you will get some long breaks during the icing process.

YOU WILL NEED:

For the icing process, you must have a VERY BIG bowl, about 15" diameter by 5" deep, or larger, and a counterspace or table area about 6' X 6' or maybe a little large and enough wax paper to cover it.

At least 2 half-sheet, standard cookie sheets (not AirBake) lined with a silicone (Silpat) sheet. No need to grease or spray.

¹ <https://www.amazon.com/ITALIAN-GARDENS-History-Favorite-Restaurant/dp/0692010092>

INGREDIENTS: (Yes, the amounts are correct.)

tsp = teaspoon, **Tbsp** = Tablespoon

For Cookies:

10 1/2 cups all-purpose flour (might need a little bit more to make dough less sticky while kneading)

2 1/2 cups white sugar

10 tsp baking powder (Yes, Rumford aluminum-free works fine.)

1 tsp baking soda

1 tsp salt

13 large eggs divided thusly:

(5 full eggs, 4 egg yolks, 4 egg whites, PLUS 4 more egg whites

Reserve the remaining yolks for an omelet or French toast later.)

Place the egg whites into two separate containers of 4 whites

each for making the icing later - you have to ice the cookies

twice!

2 1/2 Tbsp vanilla

2 1/2 cups plain (NEVER butter flavored) Crisco

1 cup whole milk

For Icing (ingredients below equally separated into two separate batches):

8 egg whites, beat until almost stiff peaks form

2 lbs (one 32 oz bag or 2 16 oz boxes) or little more powdered sugar

2 tsp vanilla, can also use clear, artificial flavor vanilla, if desired

If you have trouble separating the yolks from the whites, Bed, Bath & Beyond has a handy little \$2.50 plastic gadget that fits over a 1 cup measuring cup that works like a charm. However, be careful to separate 1 egg at a time and place yolks and whites into separate bowls - even the slightest amount of yolk in the whites will prevent the whites from forming peaks. And only beat the egg whites in a stainless steel or glass bowl, never plastic.

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a large bowl, whisk together: Flour, baking powder, baking soda, & salt.
2. Cream together sugar, eggs (5 full eggs PLUS 4 egg yolks), then mix in milk and vanilla.
3. Work Crisco into flour mixture with hands or pastry blender - pastry blender is highly recommended.
4. Combine flour mixture with egg mixture either by hand or in a very large mixer (on slow speed) with a dough hook. If mixing by hand, dough will be very sticky to begin with, so I use a very sturdy bamboo or wooden spatula to do the initial mixing and no, using surgical gloves to knead won't help, it'll still stick to your gloves. Just keep adding flour a little at a time until it just stops sticking to your hands when you pinch off a test piece.

5. Turn out dough onto floured surface and knead for a 5-10 minutes to establish gluten and form a nice uniform dough ball. Add more flour as needed, but dough should still be slightly sticky.
6. Pinch off dough and roll in hands to a uniform shape about the 1 1/2 times the size and shape of an average person's thumb or maybe a little larger. Sizing these cookies is a matter of personal preference, but be sure to adjust your cooking times accordingly and keep an eye on them while baking. Dough increases in size by about 50% during baking.
7. Place each cookie on a cookie sheet and bake at 425 degrees for about 8 – 12 minutes or until they are just BARELY a LIGHT GOLDEN color and look a little dry – you may see a little cracking on the tops, that is okay and indicates they are close to being done. Baking time varies greatly depending on the size, so I go by color. Also, the bottoms should barely be brown when you remove the cookie from the sheet.
8. If the cookies appear a little undercooked, allow them to remain on the cookie sheet until cool and use another sheet to continue baking. If they look a little overdone, immediately remove them from the cookie sheet onto the cooling rack.
9. Once cool, make the icing. Beat egg whites until you get medium-stiff peaks. Add the powdered sugar to the egg whites gradually and mix on medium speed. If icing appears too thin or soupy, add a little more powdered sugar. Don't go overboard, the icing will set up and harden once you have put it on the cookies. Add vanilla and mix once icing is desired consistency.
10. Put all the cookies into the large bowl and pour the icing over them. VERY CAREFULLY, with a large plastic spoon or spatula, SLOWLY turn the cookies over and over until they are fully coated. By hand, place each cookie, flat side down, onto the wax paper area. Be quick because the icing sets up. Note: You may have to ice in two batches if you don't have a large enough bowl. After the tops have dried, roll the cookies over so the bottoms can dry as well.
11. Once the iced cookies have fully dried, probably 2 - 3 hours, repeat steps 9. and 10.
12. In the summer and on humid days, it may take the icing quite a while to set up, but it will eventually.
13. These store well in the fridge or freezer in Ziplock-style freezer plastic bags. Don't forget to write the date on the bag.

Yield: About 14 - 18 dozen, depending on size of cookie.

MARK'S TIPS:

I have tried using the egg whites you get in the little milk carton at the grocery store, however, the pasteurization process apparently alters the structure of the egg whites and yields an icing with a different texture. My mom said the icing is "tough" and hard to bite through, so I went back to doing it the hard way. ;-)

I only use C&H brand powdered sugar and never the bargain brands. My experience has been that some generic and no-name brand powdered sugars cut their sugar with corn starch and it yields a translucent icing which isn't very aesthetically pleasing appetizing, especially on these cookies.

If you want really "white" cookies, use clear vanilla extract. Usually I just use the standard vanilla extract - the difference is barely noticeable.

During the icing process, a couple of cookies will probably break - don't worry; it's no big deal - just keep turning over the cookies and coating them. Trust me, no one will be the wiser about the crumbs in the icing and they definitely won't care because the cookies are very good.

On the Crisco - I keep mine in the refrigerator because I had a can go rancid on me even though the expiration date wasn't for another year. No telling what could've caused it, but the stuff has just gotten too expensive lately to risk another can going bad. If you open a can and there is any kind of "strange" odor to it, it is probably bad - Crisco shouldn't have much of any kind of scent at all.

One last thing, for those who are wondering why I use the term "icing" instead of "frosting." Aside from just being old-school, I found this explanation on the Internet: "Icing is generally used to glaze pastries or cakes, and tastes more sugary than frosting. The Williams-Sonoma cookbook Cake states that "icing is generally thinner and glossier," while its counterpart frosting is "a thick, fluffy mixture, used to coat the outside of a cake."

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