

BUONA DOMENICA

Crostata alla Stracciatella

Chocolate-Studded Ricotta Tart

You might already know that the word “stracciatella” translates (more or less) to “little rags.” The word is used to describe several delicious but totally different Italian foods. There’s stracciatella the soup, made by stirring beaten eggs into boiling broth to create fluffy curds. There’s also stracciatella the cheese, the creamy rag-like bits of mozzarella curd that form the inside of a ball of burrata. And there’s stracciatella the iconic gelato flavor, made with milk and cream and shards of bittersweet chocolate.

In 2019, I spent a week in Bergamo and stopped in, by chance, at a *ristorante-pasticceria* called La Marianna. Lo and behold, I had happened upon the place where stracciatella gelato was born. In 1961, founder Enrico Panattoni was looking for a way to use up leftover chocolate Easter eggs when the idea struck him to melt down the bittersweet chocolate and drizzle it into a custard base of milk and cream. The irregular shards that formed as the melted chocolate re-solidified reminded him of stracciatella the soup, which at the time was one of the most popular dishes on his restaurant menu. And so that’s what he called his sweet new creation.

A few weeks ago, as I was considering what to make for Easter dessert, it occurred to me that a similar application might work nicely in a classic ricotta crostata. It does! I didn’t use melted chocolate, but rather roughly and irregularly chopped bittersweet chocolate, a mix of small pieces, shards, and shavings. If you wanted to keep true to Panattoni’s original creation, you could break or chop up one of those large, hollow chocolate Easter eggs (uova di Pasqua) that you’ll find in any Italian bakery and grocery store (or home) right now.

Makes 8 to 10 servings

INGREDIENTS

For the pasta frolla:

2 cups (250 g) unbleached all-purpose flour

2/3 cup (80 g) confectioners’ sugar

1/4 tsp fine salt

Grated zest of 1 lemon or 1 small orange—or a little of both (about 1 Tbsp total)
1 stick plus 3 Tbsp (150 g) cold unsalted butter, cut into cubes
1 large egg
1 large egg yolk

For the filling:

8 ounces (227 g) well-drained ricotta cheese
8 ounces (227 g) mascarpone cheese
1 large whole egg
2 large egg yolks (see NOTES)
1/2 cup confectioners' sugar, plus more for serving
1/2 tsp pure vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 cup (85 g) finely chopped bittersweet chocolate

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make the pasta frolla: Put the flour, sugar, salt, baking powder if using, and zest in the work bowl of a food processor fitted with the metal blade. Pulse briefly to combine. Distribute the butter around the bowl and pulse until the mixture is crumbly. Add the egg and egg yolk and process until the dough begins to clump together.
2. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead it briefly into a ball. Form the dough into two disks, one slightly larger than the other. Wrap each disk tightly in waxed paper or reusable wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, or until well chilled (overnight is fine). If you've refrigerated the dough overnight, you'll need to give it a few minutes to soften slightly before rolling it out.
3. On a lightly floured surface, roll out the larger portion into an 11-inch circle about 1/8 (3 mm) inch thick or slightly thicker. Carefully wrap the dough around the rolling pin and drape it over a 9-inch (23-cm) fluted tart pan with a removable bottom. Gently press the dough into the bottom and up the sides of the pan. Use the rolling pin or the flat of your hand to press around the perimeter of the pan to cut off any excess dough. Put the lined tart pan in the refrigerator to chill for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350° F (180° C).

4. Make the filling: Measure the ricotta, mascarpone, whole egg and yolks, sugar, and vanilla extract into a large bowl. Using a stand mixer or a handheld beater, beat the ingredients on high speed for about 1 minute, or until thoroughly combined and fluffy. Fold in the chopped chocolate with a spatula.

5. Remove the pastry-lined tart shell from the refrigerator. Scoop in the filling and smooth it out. Roll out the reserved piece of dough into a 10-inch round about 1/8 (3 mm) inch thick or slightly thicker and cut it into strips with a fluted pastry wheel. Carefully place the strips over the filled tart shell in a lattice pattern, gently pressing the ends of the strips into the sides of the tart shell to cut off the excess. Use any scraps to cut out Easter-themed flourishes if you like.

6. Bake the crostata for 35 to 40 minutes, or until the crust is golden and the filling is puffed and just set; the center may still be a little jiggly. Remove from the oven and place on a wire rack to cool for 30 minutes, or until cool enough to handle. Remove the ring of the tart pan and let the crostata cool another 30 minutes. Use a large, wide angled spatula to carefully lift the crostata off the metal bottom of the tart pan and onto a serving plate. Or, if you don't feel comfortable with this step, leave the crostata on the metal bottom, and transfer it to a plate. Dust lightly with confectioners' sugar just before serving.

NOTES: Between the pasta frolla and the filling you'll end up with three leftover egg whites. I freeze them and use them later to make meringues, pavlovas, or amaretti cookies.

The pasta frolla can be made one day ahead and refrigerated. The crostata is at its absolute best the day it is made, while the filling is just *barely* warm. But it keeps well refrigerated for up to 5 days. Remove it from the fridge an hour before you plan to serve it to allow the filling to warm up and soften a bit. You can pop it in a low oven for a few minutes, but don't overdo it with the heat. Dust with a fresh coating of confectioners' sugar.