

BUONA DOMENICA

APPLE AND ANISE LOAF CAKE

(Plum cake di mele e anice)

There is nothing cozier than a slice of apple cake to go with your morning coffee or afternoon tea. This recipe comes from Irina Georgescu's wonderful book **Tava: Eastern European Baking and Desserts from Romania and Beyond**. In the headnote to her recipe, Irina writes that "Many people have their own favorite recipe, they bake it plain or marbled with cocoa powder, or dot it with fruit and serve it glazed or dusted with icing (confectioners') sugar."

In her original version, called "chec cu mere si chimen," Irina uses caraway seeds, which I love. But I wanted to put an Italian spin on the cake, so I substituted anise seeds. Either way, you will love this simple cake with its beautifully browned top and tender golden crumb.

Makes one (8 1/2 x 4 in) cake

INGREDIENTS

Sunflower oil or butter for the pan

1 tablespoon anise seeds

4 ounces (115 g/1 stick) unsalted butter, at cool room temperature

3/4 cup (150 g) golden granulated sugar (or regular granulated sugar)

2 medium eggs

1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 1/4 cups (150 g) unbleached all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 medium-large sweet-tart apple, such as Crimson Crisp, Gold Rush, or Honey Crisp, shredded on the large holes of a box grater (about 5 ounces/150 g pulp)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F (180° C). Grease an 8 1/2- by 4-inch (20- x 10-cm) loaf pan and line with parchment (I skipped the parchment). Toast the anise seeds by putting them in a small skillet and heating them on medium just until they turn a shade darker and are fragrant. Stir or shake the skillet as you go so that the seeds toast evenly. Set aside to cool.

2. Using a hand mixer or a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, cream the butter with the sugar until pale in color and fluffy. Add the eggs one by one, incorporating well after each addition. Beat in the vanilla. Whisk together the flour and baking powder and stir this into the batter. Fold in the shredded apple and toasted anise seeds.

3. Scrape the batter into the loaf pan (it will only fill 1/2 to 2/3 of the pan) and bake for about 40 minutes on the lower shelf of the oven, until a cake tester or toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Remove from the oven and transfer to a cooling rack for 20 minutes. Gently invert the pan to remove the cake; reinvert and let the cake cool to room temperature before serving.