

Mandatory Credit: "Excerpted from *Bouchon Bakery* by Thomas Keller and Sebastien Rouxel (Artisan Books).
Copyright © 2012."

Shortbread

Makes 24 cookies

6.3 ounces (180 grams) unsalted butter, at room temperature
½ cup (90 grams) granulated sugar
½ + 1/8 teaspoon (2 grams) kosher salt
1 teaspoon (5.9 grams) vanilla paste
1 ¾ cups + 3 tablespoons (270 grams) all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons (24 grams) granulated sugar for dusting

Traditional shortbread is a rich, crumbly, buttery cookie made with nothing more than flour, butter, and sugar. It delights me that these most basic staple ingredients become so special in your hands when you treat them well and use them in the right proportions.

Shortbread is traditionally baked in a round or square pan, then cut into wedges or rectangles. Sebastien likes to cut the dough first, sprinkle it with sugar, and then bake it, for a more beautiful cookie with a sugary crust. Because of the large amount of butter, the dough should be well chilled before you roll it out; keeping the dough cold will also help the cut cookies retain their shape when baked.

This is a wonderfully versatile dough. For instance, you can roll out the dough, cut out shapes, bake them, and fill them to make sandwich cookies. Or make chocolate shortbread by replacing a quarter of the flour with unsweetened alkalized cocoa powder.

These are also good cookies to frost and decorate for the holidays.

Shortbread will maintain straight edges better if baked in a convection oven rather than in a standard oven.

Place the butter in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Turn to medium-low speed and cream until smooth.

Add the 90 grams/½ cup sugar and the salt and mix on medium-low speed for about 2 minutes, until fluffy. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl. Add the vanilla paste and mix on low speed for about 30 seconds to distribute it evenly.

Add the flour in 2 additions, mixing on low speed for 15 to 30 seconds after each, or until just combined. Scrape the bottom of the bowl to incorporate any flour that may have settled there.

Mound the dough on the work surface and, using the heel of your hand or a pastry scraper, push it together into a 5-inch-square block. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, until firm. (The dough can be refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for up to 1 month.)

Position the racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and preheat the oven to 325°F (convection or standard). Line two sheet pans with Silpats or parchment paper.

Mandatory Credit: "Excerpted from *Bouchon Bakery* by Thomas Keller and Sebastien Rouxel (Artisan Books).
Copyright © 2012."

Unwrap the dough and place it between two pieces of parchment paper or plastic wrap. With a rolling pin, pound the top of the dough, working from left to right, to begin to flatten it, then turn the dough 90 degrees and repeat. (This will help prevent the dough from cracking as it is rolled.) Roll out to a 9-inch square. If the dough has softened, slide it (in the parchment) onto the back of a sheet pan and refrigerate it until it is firm enough to score.

Using a chef's knife and a ruler, score the dough horizontally 3 times to mark four 2 ¼-inch-wide strips. Then score it vertically 5 times at 1 ½-inch intervals (for a total of 24 sections). If the dough is not cool to the touch, refrigerate it. Once it is firm, cut through the markings.

Dust the tops of the shortbread with the 24 grams/2 tablespoons granulated sugar and arrange on the prepared sheet pans, leaving about 1 inch between them. Bake until pale golden brown, 13 to 15 minutes in a convection oven, 17 to 19 minutes in a standard oven, reversing the positions of the pans halfway through baking. Set the pans on a cooling rack and cool for 5 to 10 minutes, then transfer the cookies to the rack to cool completely.

The shortbread can be stored in a covered container for up to 3 days.

###