

Koeksisters

Sugary, sticky and crisp on the outside and moist and cakey in the middle... I couldn't get enough of these small, sweet doughnuts when I was a kid!

There's a Cape Malay and an Afrikaner version and they're quite different. The Cape Malay dish goes by the name koesister – it's usually oval in shape, more 'cakey', the dough is spiced and finished with a dusting of desiccated coconut. The Afrikaner version is often plaited, less spiced and more syrupy.



The version I grew up with was the Afrikaner koeksister. I add a few extra bits and pieces because I like more spice. So, mine gives a bit of a nod to the Cape Malay variety!

Makes about two dozen

Koeksister syrup

550 ml water

1 kg Sugar

½ teaspoon cream of tartar

Peel and juice of 1 lemon

2 small cinnamon quills

fresh ginger (about 6 thin slices)

2 bruised cardamom pods

Koeksister dough

500g flour

2 tbsp baking powder

½ tsp salt

¼ tsp nutmeg

½ tsp cinnamon

60 g grated butter

1 egg (room temperature)

250 ml (1 cup) milk

62.5 ml (¼ cup) water

2–3 l canola oil

Syrup method

Try to make the syrup the night before making your koeksisters.

Slowly dissolve the sugar in the water.

Add the cream of tartar, bring to the boil and simmer for five minutes.

Add the lemon peel and juice.

Divide the syrup evenly between two heat-proof glass dishes (two small casserole dishes would be fine).

Place one cinnamon quill, a cardamom pod and three slices of ginger in each dish.

Cool the syrup in the fridge overnight.

Note: The colder the syrup they are dunked in, the crispier the texture of the koeksisters. (I sometimes put the syrup briefly in the freezer just before I'm ready to fry.) It's best to dip the first half of the doughnuts you make in one lot of syrup, while the other syrup stays cold in the fridge, ready for the next batch.

Dough method

Sieve and combine all the dry ingredients and spices.

Rub in the butter with your fingers.

Beat the egg and combine with the milk and the water.

Mix the egg, milk and water in with the dry ingredients.

Knead until you have a soft dough.

If the dough seems too dry, add a little more water.

Divide the dough into two portions, cover with cling film and refrigerate for at least an hour.

Take the first half from the fridge and roll to 5 mm thickness.

Using a sharp knife, mark and cut the dough into rectangles measuring about 7 x 4 cm.

Cut two slices in the middle of each rectangle, leaving 5 mm intact along the top.

This will give you three strands that will look something like this:



Plait the strands the same way you would hair! (Press them together at the end so the plait doesn't unravel when frying.)



While you're plaiting (and later frying) your koeksisters, cover those you aren't working on with a damp cloth.

Heat the oil in a medium-sized pot (filled about half way) to 180°C.

(I use a cooking thermometer to make sure the temperature stays consistent.)

Take one of your dishes of syrup from the fridge and place it near where you will be frying your koeksisters.

When the oil has reached the right temperature, carefully drop in a few koeksisters at a time and deep fry for about a minute each side, or until they are golden all over.

When cooked, remove the koeksisters from the hot oil with wooden-handled tongs and plunge immediately into the syrup bath.

Leave each koeksister in the syrup for about five minutes.

Lift the koeksisters out with tongs or a slotted spoon and transfer to a wire cake rack.

Tip: place paper towels under the rack, so that your work surface doesn't get sticky (some of the excess syrup will dribble through).

When you have done all this with one batch, retrieve your second ball of dough and second dish of syrup from the fridge. Start again!

(If you find the oil is too 'dirty' you may need to let it cool and strain it before starting again, or use new oil.)

Enjoy! This can be an involved process – I find it requires an entire afternoon, but it's worth it! The recipe makes twice as many as you are likely to need for one occasion, but koeksisters freeze well. You can place them in an airtight container in the freezer as soon they have been soaked in the syrup and drained on the cake rack for a few minutes.