

## Turkish Semolina Sponge Cookies (Sekerpare)

(Recipe adapted by Aliza Green from her book, *Starting with Ingredients: Baking*)

I learned how to make these delicious, soft, and syrupy semolina sponge cookies accented with hazelnuts and scented with mastic resin in Istanbul. **Sekerpare** translates to “sugary pieces,” an apt description for these moist, light sugar syrup soaked cookies. If you can get peeled green pistachios, process them until finely ground for a lovely and traditional garnish. Purchase the mastic resin from the Chios Mastic Grower’s Association shop in New York (<http://www.mastihashopny.com>). Before using it, crush the mastic “tears” to fine powder using a mortar and pestle or a meat pounder.

Yield: 36 to 40 cookies

### Dough

**3/4** pound (**23/4** cups plus 1 tablespoon) unbleached all-purpose flour

**1/4** pound (**1/2** cup plus **21/2** tablespoons) fine semolina

2 teaspoons baking powder

2 teaspoons powdered mastic resin

1 teaspoon fine sea salt

10 ounces (**21/2** sticks) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into bits

**1/4** pound (**3/4** cup minus 1 tablespoon) confectioners’ sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

2 large eggs

1 egg white

40 whole hazelnuts

1 egg yolk, lightly beaten

### Syrup and Garnish

2 cups sugar

Juice of 1 lemon (3 tablespoons)

2 ounces (**1/2** cup) pistachios, optional

Make the dough: Rub two 18 x 13-inch half-sheet pans (or other large baking pans) with softened butter. Note: DO NOT preheat the oven. If possible, set each baking pan inside a second pan so the cookie bottoms bake evenly without burning on the bottom.

Whisk together the dry ingredients: flour, semolina, baking powder, powdered mastic, and salt.

In the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the butter, confectioners’ sugar, vanilla, eggs, and egg white, and beat until light and fluffy, 5 to 6 minutes, scraping

down the sides once or twice. Add the flour mixture and beat again, just long enough for the dough to come together.

Dust your hands with flour and form the dough into one or two long, thin logs, about 1 inch in diameter. Cut the logs into 1-inch sections, and shape each section into walnut-sized balls. Toss the balls lightly but vigorously onto the baking pans so they stick to the pan and flatten slightly. Rearrange if necessary so the balls are evenly spaced on the pans.

Press one hazelnut, with the pointy side facing up, into the center of each dough ball, so the tip of the hazelnut is at the same level as the cookie. Brush the cookies lightly but evenly with egg yolk, making sure that excess egg yolk doesn't pool into the center.

Place the trays in the oven, and set the oven temperature to 400°F. Bake the cookies for 25 to 30 minutes or until the tops of the cookies are light golden and crackled.

Make the syrup: The syrup must be ready when the cookies come out of the oven. Combine 3 cups water and the sugar in a medium heavy-bottomed pot. Bring to a boil over medium heat then simmer for 2 minutes or until the syrup is completely clear. Remove from the heat and combine with the lemon juice.

As soon as the cookies come out of the oven, pour all the hot syrup over them, making sure that all the cookies are evenly drenched in the syrup. There should be about **1/2** inch of syrup in the pans, which will be absorbed by the cookies as they cool.

Make the garnish: bring a small pot of water to a boil. Add the pistachios and boil for 1 minute. Drain, then rub off skins and spread the pistachios out on paper towels to dry. Place them into the bowl of a food processor and process to a fine green powder. Or, simply process green pistachios to a fine green powder. Cool the cookies to room temperature, then sprinkle with the pistachios before serving. Store covered and at room temperature for up to three days.