



KATARZYNA ANDERS

Traditional Polish Maturing Gingerbread

The history of gingerbread

Baking gingerbread, or rather honey spice cakes, has a very long tradition. Already in antiquity, cakes with honey and pepper were baked. However, in the Middle Ages, orders, especially the Benedictines, cultivate the tradition of baking spicy gingerbreads.

Along with the development of trade, thanks to which the availability of spices increased, bakery guilds specializing exclusively in the production of gingerbread began to emerge in cities. It happened especially in cities situated on the most important trade routes, such as Toruń and Nuremberg. Working as a gingerbread maker required many years of study, was an honor and provided a good income.

Why spicy cakes, later called gingerbreads, became so popular? The preservative, bactericidal and health properties of honey and spices meant that the gingerbread dough did not spoil, the finished gingerbread could be stored for a very long time and had healing properties. In the beginning, gingerbread was considered a medicine, mainly for digestion, and the recipe for it could be found in a medical compendium. It was also a non-perishable military provision. Peppery pastry was also an excellent appetizer with vodka.

Currently, gingerbread can be found in the form of gingerbread cakes and gingerbread cookies, in soft and crispy versions, with or without filling, in various shapes and decorations. Gingerbread is an essential element of the Christmas season, and the Traditional Polish maturing gingerbread is definitely the king of Christmas pastries.



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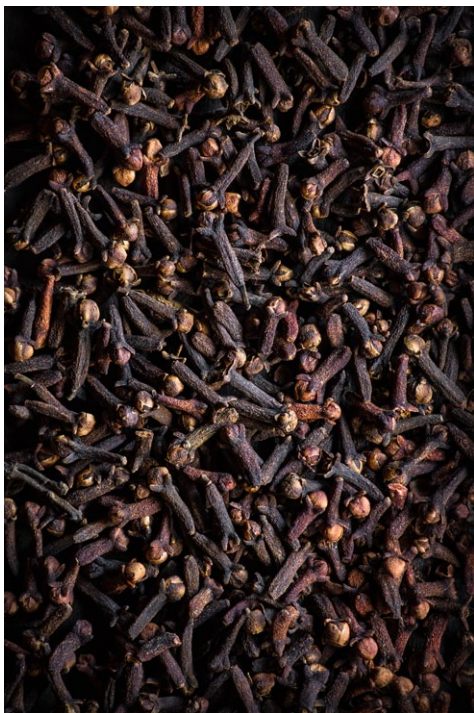
„Pierny” means peppery

Gingerbread owes its unique flavor to a mixture of aromatic spices. Hence the polish name of gingerbread, which is „piernik” - it was a „pierny” pastry, i.e. peppery, spicy, aromatic, with a beautiful aftertaste. The first gingerbreads also contained more pepper than today’s ones. Also in english the name „gingerbread” refers to ginger and its spiciness.

The gingerbread mix is primarily cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, ginger, pepper, cardamom, allspice and anise used in various combinations and proportions depending on the region, taste preferences or, especially in the past, availability.

However, the most important of this group are cinnamon and cloves. Cinnamon is the dried and ground cinnamon bark, the flavor and aroma of which are provided by cinnamon essential oil. Cinnamon has antiseptic and fungicidal properties and improves digestion. Cloves, on the other hand, are the dried, undeveloped buds of the clove tree that contain clove essential oil. This oil gives a spicy, searing taste and strong aroma, and has analgesic and digestive properties.

It is the antiseptic and bactericidal properties of most spices, along with the same properties of honey, that prevent the gingerbread dough from deteriorating - that is why it can mature for that long and the finished gingerbread can be stored for so long.



Gingerbread preparation steps

The first step - preparation of the dough

from October to 15 November

First, prepare the dough, then set it aside to mature for about 4 to 6 weeks. However, this time can be extended and it will certainly not harm our gingerbread, and it will even be better.

I am preparing my cake at the turn of October and November.

The second step - baking and filling

from 15 to 18 December

At least 5 days before serving, bake our gingerbread, split and fill it with jam, and then leave it under a weight, so that it is even and softened.

The third step - chocolate glaze or icing

from 22 to 23 December

About a day before serving, the gingerbread can be taken out of the weight and frosted with icing or covered with chocolate. I propose to cut it in half and then we can decorate it in both of the above ways.

Ingredients

Dough

- ◆ 500 g of honey
- ◆ 2 cups of sugar
- ◆ 250 g of butter
- ◆ 1 kg of wheat flour
- ◆ 3 eggs
- ◆ 3 level teaspoons of baking soda
- ◆ 1/2 cup of milk
- ◆ 1/2 teaspoon of salt
- ◆ 120 g of gingerbread spice

Filling

- ◆ 900 g plum jam

Icing

- ◆ 1 cup of powdered sugar
- ◆ about 2 tablespoons of hot water
- ◆ 1 teaspoon of lemon juice

Chocolate glaze

- ◆ 100 g of milk chocolate
- ◆ 20 g of dark chocolate



Preparation of the dough

Place the honey, sugar and butter in a pot and heat up gradually, almost to the boil.

Mix the honey and butter mass thoroughly and let it cool down.

Combine the cool mass with wheat flour, eggs, baking soda dissolved in milk, salt, gingerbread spice and carefully mix the dough.

I use medium-intensity gingerbread spice. If you have a stronger one, I suggest you to reduce its amount.





Dough maturing

If you have not mixed in it already, put the dough into a stoneware or enamel pot, then cover it with foil, make a few holes in it and put the dough in a cool place or in the fridge for 4 to 6 weeks, or even longer.

The dough may be a bit sticky now, but will become firm and easy to work with after maturing.



Dough baking

After 4 to 6 weeks, we can bake the matured gingerbread dough.

Bake the dough on baking sheets lined with baking paper. The recipe is for 3 layers of gingerbread, baked on baking sheets approximately 32 by 38 cm. A slight deviation from this measure is permissible - the gingerbread will just have a slightly different thickness.

To make the task easier, I suggest measuring a piece of paper on each sheet and folding it to the size of the sheets to see how the dough should be rolled out.

Put the dough on the countertop. To prevent it from sticking, lightly sprinkle it with flour. Divide the dough into 3 equal parts. Place each part on a piece of paper and roll it out into a rectangle with the dimensions of a sheet and a thickness of about half cm. Also lightly sprinkle with flour while rolling.

Put the paper with the dough on the trays and bake each at 180°C, upper and lower heating, for 20-25 minutes, and then let it cool down. I bake the layers one by one, placing each in the center of the oven to give the dough a chance to rise properly. While baking the first one, I prepare the next ones, so it goes very smoothly.



Filling with plum jam

The cooled down layers should be filled with plum jam.

Place the plum jam in a pot and heat it almost to the boil. Stir frequently during the process so that the jam do not burn.

Filled the layers with hot plum jam: put half of the jam on the first layer, spread it, cover with the second layer, put the rest of the jam, spread it and cover with the third layer.

Cover the gingerbread tightly with paper, then with a baking sheet, evenly put weight on it (e.g. with jars, canned food) and set aside for a minimum of 5 days in a cool place to soften.



Icing and chocolate glaze

After about 5 days of resting, the gingerbread can be decorated.

You can cover the whole gingerbread with icing or with melted chocolate in your favorite version – milk, bitter or mixed in any proportion. I recommend to decorate the gingerbread in both ways, dividing it in half and for these halves I give the amount of icing and chocolate in the ingredients.

Cut the gingerbread in half. You can also cut off its curved edges, or you can leave this for the end, just before slicing and serving.

Melt the milk and bitter chocolates in a water bath and mix. Make the icing separately by mixing the powdered sugar thoroughly with water and lemon juice.

Pour chocolate glaze over half of the gingerbread and cover the other half with icing.

When the icing and chocolate glaze have solidified, cover the gingerbread tightly, first with paper and then with foil so that it does not dry out. Keep cool.



Traditional Polish Maturing Gingerbread can be stored in a cool place for many days or even weeks. It will certainly not lose its taste, and even gain.

I believe that the Traditional Polish Maturing Gingerbread will also become a Christmas tradition in your home. It has been in my for almost ten years, and the preparation of dough at the turn of October and November is the first sign of the upcoming Christmas.

The spicy, aromatic taste of Traditional Polish Gingerbread is incomparable to any other and makes everyone bake it again and again.

Enjoy and Merry Christmas!





My name is Kate and I am a food, product and interior photographer, graphic designer and author of the blog [Fotokulinarnie](#).

On my blog you will find recipes for traditional dishes and pastries, useful cooking tips and travel guides, but also a growing section about food photography, which is my greatest passion. I try to make my food photos tell stories and reflect the beauty of food.

Thank you for joining my newsletter! Hope to stay in touch and I also invite you to contact me and follow through my profiles [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Pinterest](#).

Bibliography

Information about gingerbread and its history from pages 2, 4 from muzumpiernika.pl,
Living Museum of Gingerbread in Toruń.

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