

# [Brandywine Table]

## Baking History

A TRIBUTE TO FAMILY RECIPES  
AND GREAT GRAINS

Alyssa Thayer



At market biscotti

LIKE MESSAGES IN AN AGRICULTURAL VERSION of the telephone game—when messages get muddled as they're passed along—modern-day grains and cereals have been hybridized and processed so many times they hardly resemble the originals. Early versions of these crops, known as “ancient” or “heritage,” differed in taste, composition and nutritional value. Sadly, until recently they remained largely unknown in western cultures.

**Heritage Flour Baking Co.**, based in Malvern, specializes in pastries and baking mixes made from these ancient flours. Founder Mariella Frazier has made it her mission to share these wholesome ingredients with the world. “Flour is inherently good,” she says, “it’s just the kind of flour and how you are using it that matter.”

Long before she was the queen of ancient grain baking, Mariella was born and raised on Malta, a small Mediterranean island. Due to numerous transitions of power, Malta became a melting pot of cultures and, consequently, of cuisines. “It was typical to have both cannolis and Christmas pudding,” she remembers fondly.

At age 21 Mariella married an American Navy pilot and set off to the United States to begin a new life. It wasn’t long before she began missing traditional dishes of her homeland. To satisfy this craving, she taught herself to cook and bake the recipes she remembered. “I had a hankering for a good cannoli and thought I could make it,” she recalls.



Mariella Frazier at market

By the time life brought Mariella and her family to Pennsylvania, she was ready to share her baked goods with the world. Starting small, she brought her traditional European pastries to farmers markets. And the response was overwhelming!

Because good ingredients had always been important to Mariella, when customers asked about gluten-free options she was determined to find simple and natural alternatives. Research led her to the world of heritage flours. And although not all are gluten-free, these flours were nutritionally superior and often better tolerated by those with gluten sensitivities.

Mariella began experimenting and substituting these “new” ingredients into her recipes. And at first, it was a challenge. The older flours were delicate to work with and had different properties than traditional ingredients. But she was committed, and the results were spectacular. She never

looked back. You can sample her products at local farmers markets (Downingtown, Eagleview, Malvern, Upper Merion in KOP), in the online store, and at other regional shops and farm stands.

With their skillful scratch baking and passion for pure ingredients, Heritage Flour Baking Co. is making ancient grains new again.



Mariella in Malta



### Almond Ricotta and Honey Cake

*A lovely classic almond and ricotta cake, this one uses honey as the sweetener. Great by itself or topped with a sweet berry compote. The cake recipe is adapted from Il Giornale del Cibo.*

- 1¼ C. whole-milk ricotta
- 1 C. blanched slivered almonds, ground to a coarse flour
- 2½ C. organic einkorn flour
- 1 Tb. baking powder
- 1 pinch of salt
- ½ C. honey, or 1¼ C. sugar
- 1 stick melted butter, cooled
- 5 eggs
- 1 organic lemon, zest and juice
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ⅓ C. sliced almonds for garnish
- 2 Tb. sugar for garnish

Drain the ricotta in the refrigerator, using a colander set over a bowl, for 2–3 hours.

Preheat oven to 350°. Butter and flour a 9-inch bundt pan.

Pulse the almonds in a food processor until ground to a coarse flour. Set aside.

In a separate bowl, sift together flour, baking powder and salt. Then add the ground almonds.

In another bowl, add the honey to the drained ricotta and mix. Then add the cooled, melted butter and mix again by hand or mixer until light and fluffy. Add in eggs, lemon peel and juice, vanilla and mix until just combined.

Add the dry ingredients to the ricotta mixture. Mix until just combined.

Pour batter into prepared pan and sprinkle enough sliced almonds

over the surface of the cake to cover. Dust with granulated sugar.

Bake for about 45–50 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean.

Let the cake cool in the pan for about 10–15 minutes. Gently turn it out onto a cooling rack and let it cool fully before slicing.

### Berry Compote

- 3 C. mixed berries, raspberries, blueberries and strawberries
- 2–3 Tb. brown sugar

Place berries and brown sugar in a small saucepan over a low heat and bring to a simmer. Cook the fruit for about 15–20 minutes, until soft. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

Serve over the Almond Ricotta Cake.

### Berry Tartelettes

*An old-timey recipe that tastes like a ray of sunshine. Create perfect dainty little cakes that will make you want to throw a tea party. This recipe is adapted from URDinkel.ch, a German website for ancient grain flour.*



- 1 C. spelt flour (oberkulmer, if you can find it)

- 1¼ tsp. baking powder

- 2 pinches of salt

- Heaping ½ cup of peeled ground almonds

- 4 egg whites

- ⅔ C. sugar

- 9 Tb. butter, melted and slightly cooled

- 1 Tb. orange-blossom or rose water

- 2 C. mixed berries, cut into pieces if large

- Powdered sugar for dusting

Preheat oven to 350°. Butter tartlet or 4-inch cake molds.

Sift together flour, baking powder and one pinch of salt. Add the ground almonds and set aside.



## Ancient Grains 101

**What are they?** Although definitions differ, the term ancient grains generally refers to varieties of grains and pseudocereals (non-grasses used like cereals, such as amaranth, quinoa, buckwheat) that existed before modern-day agriculture and have remained largely unchanged.

**What makes them great?** Modern grains have been bred for faster propagation, higher yields and easier milling, and they undergo processing that strips away much of their natural nutrients and flavor. Yet ancient grains remain nutrient-rich and are said to support healthy digestion and immune systems. These benefits, coupled with their interesting nutty flavor and chewy texture, make them worth trying.

**Where do they come from?** Until fairly recently, ancient grains were not well known in western cultures, although they've been staples for other parts of the world for thousands of years. Examples include quinoa for the Incas, farro in ancient Italy, and kamut in Egypt.

**Are they gluten-free?** Some varieties are naturally gluten-free, including amaranth, quinoa, buckwheat, millet and teff. Others, such as the heritage varieties of wheat, do contain gluten (and are unsuitable for celiacs), but lack the specific proteins that can make them hard to digest.

**How do I use them?** You can boil and use them in place of rice, or grind them and use as them as flour. Mariella of Heritage Flour Baking Co. cautions that these flours are delicate and don't like being over handled. So a light touch is needed.

Beat the egg whites together with one pinch of salt until stiff. Gradually add the sugar and beat until shiny.

Add butter and the orange-blossom water to the dry ingredients. Using a spatula carefully fold into the dough mixture.

Fill tartlet or cake molds with batter, and distribute the berries over the batter. Save a few for garnishing.

Place tartlets in the middle of the oven. Bake for 25–30 minutes.

Remove tartlets when done and allow them to cool. Dust with powdered sugar directly before serving and garnish with berries.

Makes 6 tartlets or mini-cakes.

### Chocolate Sablés/Shortbread

*These continental classics are rich, decadent, and yet surprisingly low in sugar. Pairs perfectly with stone fruit or berries, or served alongside light pudding-y desserts. The recipe is adapted from Great British Spelt Recipes.*

- 14 Tb. unsalted butter, chilled
- 2¼ C. white or a blend of whole and white spelt (oberkulmer)
- ⅔ C. cocoa powder
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. flaked sea salt or ½ tsp. fine
- ¼ C. sugar

½ C. light brown sugar

1 C. (6 oz.) dark chocolate (65-70% cocoa), roughly chopped

Preheat oven to 350°. Line two baking trays with parchment paper.

Cube butter into small pieces and chill in fridge or freeze for 5 to 15 minutes.

Place the flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, salt and sugars together in the bowl of

stand-up mixer fitted with a paddle or sturdy hand mixer attachment, and stir to combine.

Add the cold butter and, with the mixer on the lowest speed, mix *only* until butter chunks disappear, and the mixture is sandy. (You may need to hold a tea towel over edges because cold butter is likely to make the flour jump out of the bowl.)

Add chocolate and mix to combine.

Tip the mixture onto the work surface and very gently knead to bring together. Divide the dough in half and roll into logs, about 1.5" in diameter. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate. Chill the dough for a few hours until firm.

Using a thin sharp knife, cut each log into cookies, about ⅜" thick. (Don't worry if the cookies crumble, just press them gently back together.)

Place cookies on the prepared baking trays and bake for 10–12 minutes or until they spread and lightly set around the edges but still look undercooked in the middle. Allow to cool on the tray for 10 minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

Store in a sealed container. Cookies will keep for a few days, if they aren't eaten before then!

Makes 25 to 30 cookies.



### Cassata 'Nfurnata

*A crustless Ricotta Cheesecake from Sicily, this recipe is as old as the hills, and every family has its own version—this one is my family's. It makes for a beautifully light cheesecake, that's not overly sweet!*

- 3½ C. whole-milk ricotta, drained
- 2 sticks butter, melted
- 1 Tb. grated lemon peel
- ⅛ tsp. salt
- ¾ C. sugar
- 8 eggs, beaten
- ½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 3 heaping Tb. flour (or potato starch to make it gluten free)

*Orange/Raisin Variation:*

- 1 Tb. finely grated orange zest (in lieu of lemon peel)
- 2½ Tb. candied orange peel, finely diced
- 2½ Tb. raisins

Drain ricotta in the refrigerator, in a colander set over a bowl, for 2–3 hours. Pass through a food mill for a smoother consistency.

Preheat oven to 325°. Butter and flour a pie pan about 10½" wide and 2½" deep.

Mix together ricotta, melted butter, lemon peel and salt. Add sugar, eggs and vanilla.

Sift in the flour or potato starch.

Pour into a pie pan. Bake until done, about 45–55 minutes. Remove from oven and cool.

Keep in fridge until half an hour before serving. It's traditionally served upside-down, as shown in the photo.

Serves about 16. ♦

*Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother's organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table.*



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