

Plum and pistachio bars

A traditional Bakewell tart consists of a pastry shell filled with jam and almond cream filling, finished with a layer of icing and a cherry on top. My version here replaces the jam layer with fresh plums for brightness and acidity. A little raising agent in the rich nutty filling lightens the crumb, while the layer of white icing has been replaced by a light dusting of icing sugar. Cut into bars, this is a hand-held, portable cake to take with you on a long drive, to a picnic or to pack into a lunchbox, but it's equally good plated for dessert and served with cream. Serves 8

WHAT YOU NEED

Pastry

300g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
90g icing sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon fine sea salt
200g unsalted butter, cold, cut into cubes
1 large egg yolk
20ml water, ice-cold

Plum and pistachio filling

80g self-raising flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon fine sea salt
150g unsalted butter, softened
150g caster sugar
zest of 1 lemon
3 eggs
40g ground almonds
40g ground pistachios
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon almond extract (optional)
6 small red plums, de-stoned, each cut into 6 wedges/slices

To finish

icing sugar, for dusting

WHAT TO DO

To make the pastry, combine the flour, icing sugar and salt in a food processor. Process for a few seconds, then add the butter and pulse a few times until the mixture is the consistency of crumbs. Lightly whisk together the egg yolk and water, then add this to the mix, pulsing just to combine.

Tip the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface – it will be quite soft and slightly sticky. Dust your hands lightly with flour, pat the dough to form a ball, then divide it in two. Wrap each half loosely in plastic wrap and press gently to form 2 flattish discs. You will only be using one disc for this recipe – refrigerate for at least 1 hour (and up to 3 days) before using. Freeze the other for another time.

Meanwhile, line the base and sides of a 20 cm square cake tin, ideally with a removable base, with baking paper. If your tin doesn't have a removable base, extend the baking paper 5 cm over the side of the tin; this will help with removing the cake later.

Remove the pastry from the fridge. If it has been in the fridge for longer than 1 hour, allow it to rest at room temperature for a few minutes. Tap the pastry with a rolling pin to soften it slightly before rolling it out to 4 mm thick. Place the cake tin on the pastry to use as a guide to cut out a 20 cm square. Using your rolling pin to help lift the square, gently lower it into the base of the tin and prick it all over with a fork. Refrigerate for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 180°C fan-forced.

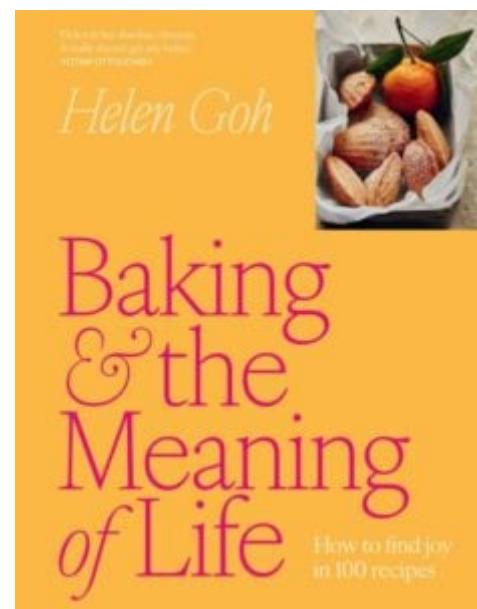
Bake the pastry for 15–17 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool slightly. Reduce the oven temperature to 160°C fan-forced.

To make the pistachio filling, sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a medium bowl. Place the butter, caster sugar and lemon zest in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and beat on medium speed until just combined – not until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, and beat for a minute between each addition. Once the eggs are all incorporated, reduce the speed to low and add the sifted dry ingredients, followed by the ground almonds, pistachios and almond extract (if using). Mix until just combined, then scrape into the pastry shell and smooth out into an even layer using an offset spatula or spoon. Place the plums in a single layer on top of the batter – they will eventually sink, but need to be exposed to the heat of the oven in the first instance.

Bake for about 45 minutes or until golden brown and firm – tap the centre of the cake with your 3 middle fingers to check. When cooked, transfer to a wire rack and cool completely. Using the baking paper, lift the cake out of the tin. Dust liberally with icing sugar and slice into 8 even bars.

Preparation Tip

If plums don't take your fancy, you can replace them with apricots, raspberries or cherries (the sour morello variety



are particularly good here). [SAVE](#) [PRINT](#)

Images and text from Baking and the Meaning of Life by Helen Goh, photography by Laura Edwards. Murdoch Books RRP \$55.00