

Maple Pecan Panforte

Makes about 32 portions

This version may offend the Italian traditionalists, but if living in New Orleans has taught me anything, it is that Italian-Americans (and Creole Italians in particular) make magic when they adapt their culinary traditions to what is available where they currently live.

I bake my panforte in an 8" square baking pan rather than the traditional round because I think it makes it easier to portion into neat rectangles for gifting. I have a square pan with a removable bottom which makes removing the cooled panforte considerably easier - if you don't have a similar pan, then I would recommend a 9" round springform. Many panforte recipes feature an addition of melted chocolate, but I found that it muted the maple flavor. I add just a tablespoon each of cocoa powder and cocoa nibs instead. I also add just a touch of corn syrup to prevent the maple syrup from crystalizing as it cooks. You could substitute glucose if you have it.

Judging the "doneness" of a cooked panforte can be tricky, because it will still feel quite molten when you remove it from the oven, and firm up as it cools. I would err on the side of underdone than over, as a too-firm panforte could break a tooth. I allow my own to cure completely overnight before portioning. If it still feels a bit sticky or soft when you go to divvy it up, you can pop it in the freezer for a few hours, cut it into neat slices, and let it come to room temperature. You'll want to cut it with a sharp serrated knife, using short sawing motions to neatly slice through the pecans, revealing an appealing terrazzo of fruit and nuts.

A last note - I would recommend sticking to the ratio of dates I've included here. A version I made with more dates turned out far too sweet. I've also included imperial measurements, though I recommend you stick to the weights, as dried fruit and nuts can vary so much in volume when piled in a measuring cup.

Maple Pecan Panforte

188 grams / two cups	whole pecans, toasted
155 grams / 1 cup	dried figs, chopped
113 grams / a packed ½ cup	dates, chopped
50 grams / a scant ½ cup	candied orange peel, chopped
90 grams / ¾ cup	all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon	cocoa nibs
1 tablespoon	cocoa powder
½ teaspoon	cinnamon
½ teaspoon	kosher salt
¼ teaspoon	five spice powder
¼ teaspoon	freshly grated nutmeg
⅛ teaspoon	freshly ground black pepper
200 grams / ⅔ cup minus one teaspoon	maple syrup

164 grams / $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus one tablespoon	granulated sugar
22 grams / 1 tablespoon	corn syrup
28 grams / 2 tablespoons	butter
A couple tablespoons	confectioner's sugar

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

Prepare your pan by spraying the heck out of it with pan spray - I use Pam. Then line the bottom with parchment paper and spray again. I use an extra long piece of parchment so that I have a sling to pull the finished panforte out of the pan.

Combine your pecans, cocoa nibs, chopped dates, figs, and orange peel in a bowl. In another bowl combine the flour, cocoa, salt, and spices and whisk to combine. Toss the dried fruit and nuts in the dry ingredients, taking care that all the pieces of dried fruit are adequately separated. Place this bowl near the stove, and set the butter nearby so it's close to hand.

In a small non-reactive pot, combine the maple syrup, corn syrup, and sugar. Cook the syrup mix over medium heat, stirring gently with a heat proof spatula, until the sugar is dissolved. Using a candy thermometer or an instant-read thermometer, continue to cook the syrup until it hits 240 degrees - this should take about a minute and a half from when the syrup begins to boil. Pause for a beat so that the syrup can carry to about 243 degrees, then turn off the heat and add the butter, followed by the dried fruit mixture. Stir it vigorously until it is well combined - it will feel quite thick. Scrape the mixture into your prepared pan. I like to use a greased square of parchment paper to press the mixture into an even layer, though you could use gloved hands if you like. It will be very thick, and the panforte mix will cool rapidly and won't be too tricky to handle.

Place the panforte in the oven and bake for forty minutes. When you remove it, it will still feel soft in the middle and may be bubbling lightly at the edges - it will firm up a lot as it cools. I like to let it cool for about twenty minutes in the pan, and then take a sharp knife or offset spatula and run it around the edge of the pan to separate it from the sides. You can then carefully flip it out onto a clean work surface. It may still feel a little sticky and soft - this is normal. You don't want to let it cool completely in the pan, as this will make it difficult to unmold. Carefully peel off the parchment paper from the bottom of the panforte. Sprinkle the panforte with the confectioner's sugar, rubbing it into the surface, and let cool completely. Allow it to cure overnight before portioning (or freeze it for a little while if you're in a rush). You can store it wrapped tightly in plastic wrap or beeswax- coated cloth for several months at cool room temperature.