

Apple Hedgehogs

Ingredients

- 6 firm apples, eg granny smith, gala, pink lady (not too large)
- 12 pitted dates
- 3 egg whites
- 3/4 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon cornflour
- sliced or slivered almonds
- 12 currants or small sultanas



Note

French chef Antonine Careme is said to have created *meringue des pommes en herrison* 200 odd years ago. It was served at the Brighton Pavilion, the Prince Regent's palace, in 1817, which made it highly fashionable. It was originally made using 40 whole apples, peeled, cored, stuffed and then piled into a big mound on a dish. Any gaps were filled with a blend of pureed apple 'marmalade' and apricot jam. The apples were then blanketed with meringue, and studded with almond or pistachio slivers, to resemble hedgehog quills or spines. This is a much simplified version, echoing the original, yet still delicious and delightful – especially for children, who will enjoy the whimsy.

Directions

Preheat oven to 180°C and line a baking tray with silicon paper. Peel and core apples, halve across the middle (ie horizontally) and place each half on the baking tray, leaving a good 5 or 6 centimetres between each one. Press two dates into the centre of each apple.

Using electric beaters, whip egg whites and 1/4 cup of the sugar in a large bowl until egg becomes thick, white and glossy. Gradually add remaining sugar and cornflour, and beat until stiff and peaks hold their form.

Spoon meringue mixture over apples, to form at least 1/2-centimetre coating, taking care not to leave any gaps. Insert almond slices into the meringue to mimic spines or quills. Place in oven on lowest rack, reduce heat to 140°C (120°C fan-forced) and bake for 15–20 minutes, checking occasionally that meringue is not discolouring and almonds are not browning too quickly. If colouring, place a solid tray on the rack above to minimise exposure to radiant heat, or prop the oven door open just a little to reduce heat slightly. Use a fine skewer to check that meringue has cooked and apples have softened but still hold their form. Remove from oven and gently press currants or sultanas into position as eyes, and allow hedgehogs to cool (do not refrigerate or meringue will become tacky). Once completely cooled, transfer to a sealed container or a platter covered with a cloth. Serve within 24 hours.

