

SICILIAN SFINCI

Traditional Italian Fried Dough Balls

Makes: about 28-32 sfinci **Serves:** 8

Prep: 20 minutes **Rise:** 1 1/2-2 hours **Cook:** about 20 minutes

Ingredients

- 4 cups (500 g) all-purpose flour
- 1 1/4 cups (300 ml) whole milk, lukewarm
- 1/3 cup + 1 tablespoon (100 ml) lukewarm water
- 1/4 cup (50 g) granulated sugar
- 3 1/2 tablespoons (50 g) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 large eggs, room temperature
- 3/4 oz (20 g) fresh yeast, or 2 1/4 teaspoons (7 g) active dry yeast
- 1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon or 1 orange
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Vegetable, sunflower, or peanut oil, for frying
- Powdered sugar, for serving

Instructions

- 1. Activate the yeast.** Pour the lukewarm milk into a small bowl. Add the yeast and 1 teaspoon of the sugar. Stir and let stand for 5-10 minutes, until slightly foamy.
- 2. Make the dough.** Place the flour and remaining sugar in a large bowl. Add the citrus zest and vanilla. Add the eggs, yeast mixture, and lukewarm water. Mix until a soft dough begins to form.
- 3. Add the butter.** Work in the softened butter a little at a time. Add the salt last. Beat or knead for several minutes, until the dough is smooth, elastic, very soft, and slightly sticky. Do not add excess flour.
- 4. Let it rise.** Cover the bowl and let the dough rise in a warm, draft-free place for 1 1/2-2 hours, or until doubled in size.
- 5. Heat the oil.** Pour several inches of frying oil into a deep, heavy-bottomed pot and heat to 340-350 F (170-175 C).
- 6. Shape the sfinci.** Lightly oil your hands or dip two spoons in water. Take small portions of dough and form rough balls. Traditional sfinci do not need to be perfectly round.
- 7. Fry.** Carefully drop a few pieces of dough into the hot oil. Do not overcrowd the pot. Fry for about 3-4 minutes, turning often, until puffed and deep golden brown.
- 8. Drain.** Remove with a slotted spoon and place on paper towels. Continue until all the dough has been fried.

9. Finish. Let the sfinci cool slightly, then dust generously with powdered sugar. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Nonna's Tips

- Keep the dough soft and slightly sticky for light, fluffy sfinci.
- Maintain the oil at 340-350 F (170-175 C) so the centers cook before the outside becomes too dark.
- Use about a heaping tablespoon of dough for each sfinci; larger pieces can remain undercooked inside.
- For a traditional variation, add 1/2 cup soaked and drained raisins, a little Marsala, or a pinch of anise or fennel seeds.
- Sfinci are best eaten the same day they are fried.