Brown Butter and Sage Sablés

Season: All | Active Time: 1 hour | Total Time: 3 hours 20 minutes (includes 2 hours for chilling the dough) | Difficulty: 2 (Easy)

I love the sandy, dissolving texture of traditional sablé cookies—like a lighter, more tender shortbread. Besides being buttery, sablés are pretty much a blank canvas. I wasn't sure if the flavors of brown butter and sage would work in a sweet cookie, since they're typically used in savory recipes, but they totally do, adding a slightly grown-up complexity to the humble sablé.

Makes about 36 cookies

Special Equipment: Stand or hand mixer

2 sticks **unsalted butter** (8 oz / 227g)

4 large fresh leafy **sage sprigs** (0.5 oz / 14g)

1¾ cups **all-purpose flour** (8 oz / 228g)

¼ cup **cornstarch** (1.2 oz / 35g) ①

1 teaspoon **Diamond Crystal kosher salt** (0.11 oz / 3g)

¾ cup **granulated sugar** (5.3 oz / 150g)

1 teaspoon finely grated **lemon zest**

2 large **egg yolks** (1.1 oz / 32g)

2 teaspoons **vanilla extract**

½ cup **demerara sugar**

Cook the sage and butter: In a small saucepan, combine the butter and sage and cook over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally, until the butter comes to a boil. Continue to cook, scraping the bottom and sides constantly with a heatproof spatula, until the sage leaves sizzle and fry and the butter sputters, foams, and eventually you see browned bits floating about, 5 to 8 minutes. ②

Cool the sage butter: Pour the butter and sage mixture into the bowl of a stand mixer (or into a large bowl if using a hand mixer), making sure you scrape in all the browned bits. Pluck out all of the sage, letting any excess butter drip back into the bowl, and set the sprigs aside for later. Let the butter cool completely to room temperature, stirring occasionally, until it starts to solidify. (To speed this process along, submerge the bottom of the bowl in ice water and stir the butter until it turns opaque, but take care to not let it harden.) ③

Mix the dry ingredients: While the butter is cooling, in a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, cornstarch, and salt and set aside.

Cream the butter and sugar: Set the bowl of solidified butter on the mixer and attach the paddle. Add the granulated sugar and lemon zest and beat on medium until the mixture is thoroughly combined and pale, about 2 minutes.

Beat in the egg yolks and vanilla: Use a flexible spatula to scrape down the sides of the bowl and add the egg yolks and vanilla. Beat on medium until just combined, about 30 seconds.

Add the flour mixture: Turn off the mixer and add all of the flour mixture, then mix on the lowest speed just until the dry ingredients are incorporated and you have a smooth dough. Fold the dough by hand with a flexible spatula several times to make sure everything is well mixed and no floury spots remain.

Form the dough into logs: Divide the dough in half and place each half on a 10-inch-long sheet of parchment paper. Roll each piece of dough into a tight 8-inch-long cylinder (see this page for a visual guide to rolling dough into logs). Wrap each parchment log in plastic wrap and refrigerate until the dough is firm, at least 2 hours or up to 2 days.

Make the sage sugar: Meanwhile, pick the reserved sage leaves from the stems and add half of the leaves to a small bowl with the demerara sugar. ④ Massage the mixture with your fingertips until the sage has broken down into tiny bits throughout the sugar.

Preheat the oven and prepare the pans: Arrange two oven racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and preheat to 350˚F. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper.

Roll the dough in sugar and slice: Remove one log of dough from the refrigerator and unwrap. Gently sprinkle about half of the sage sugar across a clean work surface or cutting board, then roll the log in the sugar, pressing down very firmly as you roll so the sugar adheres. Continue to roll and press until the entire log is coated. Use a sharp, thin-bladed knife to cut the log crosswise into ¼- to ½-inch-thick coins, rotating the log as you cut to avoid flattening one side. You should get about 18 cookies per log. Transfer the coins to one of the prepared baking sheets, spacing them about 2 inches apart. Refrigerate the first sheet of cookies while you repeat the process with the second log and remaining sage sugar, slicing and arranging the cookies on the second prepared baking sheet.

Bake: Bake the cookies on the upper and lower racks until they're golden around the edges, 16 to 20 minutes, switching racks and rotating the sheets front to back halfway through. Remove from the oven and let the cookies cool completely on the baking sheets.

DO AHEAD

The cookies, stored airtight at room temperature, will keep up to 4 days but are best served the day they're made. The dough, rolled into logs and refrigerated, will keep up to 3 days or can be frozen up to 2 months (thaw the logs in the refrigerator for 1 day before slicing and baking). If you're making cookies from dough that was made more than 2 days ahead, it's best to fry a fresh batch of sage leaves and mix with demerara sugar just before baking so the sugar is fresh and fragrant.

① Feel free to use an additional ¼ cup of all-purpose flour (1.2 oz / 33g) if you don't have cornstarch; just note that the final texture won't be as light.

② Don't leave the butter unattended while it's bubbling in the saucepan. It will begin to sputter violently onto your stove or bare skin, and you risk burning the milk solids.

③ Only proceed when the butter has cooled completely and begun to set up in the bowl, otherwise you will compromise the cookies' sandy texture.

④ Save the remaining sage leaves and sprinkle them over pastas, potato dishes, soups, or roast chicken.