

Pączki (Polish doughnuts)



*I hardly ever use recipes from the internet, least of all from unknown food bloggers (of whom there seem to be a few million). Usually I spend hours, days even, researching the thing I want to make in various books and then come up with a hybrid recipe that, for me, takes the best of each. But these Polish doughnuts are an exception. With barely a thought (OK, I did check in a few books, very quickly) I followed this recipe from the **For the Body and Soul** blog pretty much exactly and it worked so well I've barely tweaked it.*

*My aim was to recreate the light, puffy, too-easy-to-eat doughnuts we'd had at **Cukiernia Samanta** - a fantastic bakery in Zakopane, Poland where they make literally millions of doughnuts, especially in time for Fat Thursday (at the start of Lent) when all of Poland goes doughnut crazy. After many hours of mixing, kneading, resting, shaping and frying this beautiful enriched dough, I succeeded. My note to self for next time is to let the dough rise (more slowly) in the fridge as it would be easier to roll and shape when cold.*

Makes: 3 dozen medium doughnuts

For the doughnuts:

1kg plain flour, divided
100g fresh yeast (also known as compressed yeast or cake yeast)
75g white sugar, divided
½ litre whole milk, divided
8 egg yolks
100g unsalted butter, melted
16g vanilla sugar
50ml cherry liqueur or plum brandy (or vodka)
finely grated zest of one large orange
a pinch of salt
1 litre sunflower oil for deep-frying

Plus:

350g rose hip or rose petal jam mixed with 2 tbsps cherry liqueur or plum brandy (or rum)
caster sugar for dusting the fried doughnuts

1. Heat half the milk over low heat until slightly warm, but not hot (or it will kill the yeast). Crumble yeast in a large bowl. Add warm milk, one tablespoon of the sugar and five tablespoons of the flour. Stir to combine and dissolve. Cover with a tea towel and set aside in a warm place. Let rise until spongy.
2. Place the egg yolks, remaining sugar, vanilla sugar, salt and two tablespoons of slightly warm (but not hot) water in the bowl of an electric standing mixer and beat with the whisk attachment until fluffy and pale. (Or do it by hand, for longer than you think.)
3. Add the egg mixture, the remaining milk, the alcohol and orange zest to the yeast mixture and stir until all the ingredients are well combined.
4. Sift the remaining flour into a big bowl, pour in the egg and yeast mix and stir with a spoon until well combined. If the mixture is too dry add more milk, but you shouldn't need to. Knead dough by hand for at least 20 mins or until smooth and soft. The softer the dough, the more tender the doughnuts.

5. Gradually add the melted butter and continue kneading until the dough incorporates it and is no longer sticky. This seems impossible, but it will all be absorbed and the dough will become smooth again. Shape dough into a ball, transfer to a large clean bowl, cover with a tea towel and leave in a warm place until doubled in bulk, about one hour.
6. Place half the dough on a lightly floured work surface. Sprinkle lightly with flour and roll to a thickness of $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Using a glass or cookie cutter, cut circles approximately three inches in diameter. (You can gather up the scraps of dough and re-roll them.) Spoon about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a teaspoon of jam filling into the centre of each circle. Raise edges of dough and pinch together firmly, then roll into balls. Make sure the jam is well and truly sealed inside the ball as it has a tendency to leak out later. Note that dough dusted with flour will not stick to itself, so brush off any excess flour before pinching the disks closed.
7. As you shape the doughnuts put them onto parchment lined baking sheets and keep covered with a tea towel. Repeat with all the dough. Let rise in warm place until doubled in size.
8. Heat oil over medium heat in a big, deep pan. Use enough oil so that doughnuts can float freely (about 2½") but never fill a pan more than 1/3 when deep-frying. (Have ready the pan lid in case of fire.) Test the temperature by frying a small piece of dough; it should bubble and float up immediately.
9. Fry several doughnuts at a time. Cook on each side until golden brown, about two-three mins per side. Lift out with a slotted spoon to drain on paper towels. While warm, toss with caster sugar to coat.
10. Eat soon! These doughnuts are heavenly warm from the fryer, delicious later that day, a bit dry the next day, and approaching cardboard by the day after that.