Brutti ma buoni! Delicious Hazelnut Meringue Cookies

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Piedmont in Northwestern Italy may be famous for the aromatic white truffles and great wines it produces, but the region is also known for some of the world's nest hazelnuts.

Large and round and with exceptional avor, Piedmontese [2] hazelnuts even have their own IGP designation to protect the standards of their production. Known as nocciole Piedmontese, the nuts are highly prized by confectioners. Often they are combined with chocolate to make a wide variety of sweets. Bakeries sell hazelnut cakes, candies and biscotti. When I visited the home of Piedmontese friends one afternoon, they served brutti ma buoni (ugly but good) a delicious hazelnut meringue cookie, accompanied by glasses of refreshing Moscato D'Asti [3]. The crisp light cookies and delicate Moscato were the perfect afternoon snack.

When buying hazelnuts, smell them if you can to be sure that they are very fresh. The nuts have a

high oil content which can make them turn rancid very quickly. Store the nuts in the freezer and use them as soon as possible after purchasing.

Butter and our 3 baking sheets or line them with parchment paper. Arrange two racks in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Place the hazelnuts and sugar in a food processor. Pulse until the nuts are nely ground. Transfer to a large bowl.

In a large electric mixer bowl, beat the egg whites on medium speed with the salt until foamy. Increase the speed to high and beat until stiff peaks form. With a rubber spatula, gently fold the egg whites into the nut mixture. Add the vanilla.

Drop the batter by tablespoon-fuls onto the prepared baking sheets leaving 2 inches between each. Bake the cookies 20 to 25 minutes or until firm and lightly browned around the edges. Let cool 10 minutes on the pans, and then transfer to racks to cool completely. Store in an airtight container. Cookies keep well for 2 weeks.

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