

DULCIA DOMESTICA

HOMEMADE ANCIENT ROMAN SWEETS

Stuffed Dates



Pompeian fresco depicting dried figs, coupled figs, and dates (Fresco 8645, National Archaeological Museum of Naples), on public display. Photo: Farrell Monaco

“Home-made sweets: Take the stone from the palm dates or ordinary dates and stuff them with nuts or pine nuts or ground pepper. Roll in salt, fry them in cooked honey, and serve.”

Apicius - *De re coquinaria* VII: 13. 1 (AD 1st – 4th century).
Translation by Sally Grainger.

Ingredients

- 30 pitted dates (Medjool or Deglet Noor recommended, but not essential)
- 30 whole, unsalted almonds
- 1 cup of honey
- ½ cup of toasted sesame seeds
- ½ cup of cracked black pepper
- Salt to taste
- Optional: lavender or rose buds as garnish

Preparation

- Divide the pitted dates into three groups of ten.
- Stuff each date with one almond or 6 to 8 pine nuts.
- Place the honey, sesame seeds, and cracked black pepper into separate shallow bowls.
- Have plates ready nearby.
- Dip each date in honey and gently remove any excess honey with a small spoon.
- Set ten honeyed dates aside to serve plain. Roll half (ten) of the remaining honeyed dates in sesame seeds and the other half (ten) in cracked black pepper.

Plating and Presentation

- You may choose to individually plate a selection of the three date varieties as single servings, or you may decide to serve each variety on its own plate for family-style service.
- Lightly sprinkle the dates with cracked pepper and sea salt to taste.
- Feel free to add a slice of sharp or mild cheese to balance the flavors.
- Experiment with some color and a hint of floral scent and flavor by garnishing lightly with lavender or rose buds.

Getty