

Gingerbread for Digestion and Sleep

The following recipes comes from Gervase Markham's 1615 recipe book *The English Housewife*:

153. To Make Course Gingerbread

Take claret wine and colour it with turnsole, and put in sugar and set it to the fire; then take wheat bread finely grated and sifted, and liquorice, aniseeds, ginger, and cinnamon beaten very small and searced; and put your bread and your spice altogether, and put them into the wine and boil it and stir it till it be thick; then mould it and print it at your pleasure, and let it stand neither too moist nor too warm.

162. To Make Course Gingerbread

To make course gingerbread, take a quart of honey and set it on the coals and refine it: then take a pennyworth of ginger, as much pepper, as much liquorice; and a quarter of a pound of aniseeds, and a pennyworth of sanders: all of these must be beaten and searced, and so put into the honey: then put in a quarter of a pint of claret wine or old ale: then take three penny manchets finely grated and strew it amongst the rest, and stir till it come to a stiff paste, and then make it into cakes and dry them gently.

188. Coarse Gingerbread

Take a quart of honey clarified, and seethe it till it be brown, and if it be thick put to it a dish of water: then take fine crumbs of white bread grated, and put to it, and stir it well, and when it is almost cold, put to it the powder of ginger, cloves, cinnamon, and a little liquorice and aniseeds; then kneed it, and put it into moulds and print it: some use to put to it also a little pepper, but that is according unto taste and pleasure.

This recipe is straight forward to make by combining warmed honey and red wine with warming spices such as ginger, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and pepper. Add to this plenty of breadcrumbs until you end up with a thick paste. Spread into a baking tin lined with greaseproof paper and press down. Leave to cool. The mix will firm up and you can then cut into squares, decorating with some more ground ginger. The gingerbread is rich and strong so you may only want a few small pieces. Beautifully warming with a lovely soft texture, the paste could, as Markham suggests, also be shaped in moulds, to impress guests as well as care for their digestion and quality of sleep.