



How to Make Panettone: Behind the Scenes at Tommaso Muzzi

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Ever wonder how to make panettone? The dome-shaped, fluffy holiday cake with over 500 years of history is a staple of any Italian Christmas. Every year, Italians scoop up the "big bread" from local bakeries and specialty shops, wrapped and ribboned and ready-to-gift. Unlike other rustic Italian desserts, this is one that rarely gets made at home – but why?

Any curious baker who has explored how to make panettone will soon discover a long journey ahead. To find out the secrets to a soft, satisfying, and expertly-crafted panettone, we went behind the scenes with Tommaso Muzzi, a small pastry shop founded in 1795 in the heart of Foligno, a town in central Umbria. Today, Tommaso Muzzi continues to make their panettone according to the traditional recipe.

SLOW BUT STEADY

One reason that panettone is such a special seasonal treat? It is just so difficult to make! For the bakers at Tommaso Muzzi, the process begins a full four days before the finished cake is cooled and out of the forno. They start from a 100-year-old lievito madre, or natural mother yeast,



which provides the soft texture and superior flavor in each cake. After refreshing the mother yeast – a carefully guarded process and the secret to the complex, deep flavors of any dough – Tommaso Muzzi bakers bring together flour, water, and the sourdough starter.

Next, butter, sugar, candied fruit, raisins, and milk are kneaded in, creating a smooth, golden dough. From there, the dough undergoes not one, not two, but five different stages of fermentation. Not only does this process leave the panettone with a barely-there tangy taste, it also helps the panettone to maintain its freshness and texture. With such a finicky, sensitive dough, it's easy to see why many – Italians included – are keen to leave the baking to the experts!

THE SECRET INGREDIENTS

Besides the slow and steady rise, there is one factor that can make or break a panettone, and that is – you guessed it – the raw ingredients. In Tommaso Muzzi's case, every ingredient is carefully selected according to rigorous standards, from the farm-fresh butter sourced from the grasslands of Northern Italy to the plump raisins and candied citrus sourced from the south of Italy. In the words of Tommaso Muzzi bakers, each ingredient should be taken care of "as though it were a baby."

And the final secret step? A nice, long upside-down hang. To retain its iconic puffed-up shape, the bakers gently skewer the bottom of the fresh panettone and hang them upside down on a rack until cool, allowing the dome shape to set.

ENJOY ALL'ITALIANA

And when it comes to eating panettone? You can dress it up any way you like, but Tommaso Muzzi recommends that the rosey, pull-apart cake needs no addition to achieve palate perfection. There is just one important thing to remember: never, ever eat it cold! Let your panettone come to room temperature, or even slightly warmer (set it in a warm corner of your kitchen for about an hour, or do as the Italians do and put it on the radiator, wrapping and all) to help to bring out the aromas of the ingredients.

Then, use a serrated knife to slice large wedges. Nota bene: a non-serrated will squash your panettone! Finally, taste. As Tommaso Muzzi says, try paying attention to the aftertaste that remains on your palate – sweet yet citrusy, it will no doubt leave you wanting for another bite of the festive, pleasing flavor.

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