

WO KANN MAN ESSEN UND TRINKEN? (Where can you eat and drink?)

essen / speisen / trinken

LEIPZIG'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH COFFEE

Leipziger Lerchen

Leipzig's signature pastry is the Leipziger Lerche, Leipzig Lark. The name is more than a mere flight of fancy.

Since Medieval times—and probably before that—songbirds and especially larks were a popular dish, and those fattened in the terroir of Leipzig's riversides were especially sought-after by those who could afford the luxury. Larks from the city were shipped by the hundreds of thousands each year to be stewed, grilled, pan-fried, sautéed and roasted in kitchens from Madrid to Moscow. Leipzig's own favorite recipe, known as Leipziger Lerchen, stuffed and trussed the tiny birds (they are only about six inches long) and wrapped them in pastry to roast.

Hunting and exporting larks was a highly profitable business as early as the mid-1600s and by the 1720s exports from the city and surrounding region reached over a million annually. This mass slaughter of songbirds was decried by wildlife advocates for a century before the Saxon King Albert I outlawed their hunting in 1876.

Residents mourned the loss of their special dish and an inventive Leipzig baker created a pastry to commemorate this lost pleasure. History doesn't tell us the name of the baker who first created Leipziger Lerchen as a sweet pastry, nor can anyone claim to have the one original recipe. Each bakery developed its own version, but the basic ingredients, method and shape are all much the same.

Small fluted tart shells of butter-rich pastry are filled with a mixture of ground almonds lightened by beaten egg whites. Beneath this filling is a dot of red jam or a cherry, which—or so the story goes—represented the heart of the lark. Before baking, the tart is topped with a small

cross made of the pastry, thought to represent the trussing that held the stuffing in place.

Just remember that you can't sell these at your local bake sale under the name of Leipziger Lerchen—the name Leipziger Lerche has been protected by the Saxonian Bakery Guild since 1998.

Leipziger Lerchen

(Makes 12-15)

Pastry Ingredients:

2-¾ cups all-purpose flour
¼ cup butter, cut in pieces
2 egg yolks
⅓ cup sugar
Pinch of salt
1 tablespoon apricot or other brandy
½ cup strawberry jam

Filling ingredients:

½ cup all-purpose flour
¼ cup butter
2 egg yolks
1 ½ cups powdered sugar
1 ½ cups ground almonds
¼ teaspoon almond extract or bitter almond oil
1 tablespoon cornstarch
4 egg whites

Instructions:

Pastry: Sift flour into a bowl. Add butter. Knead in with your fingers. Stir together the egg yolks, sugar, salt and brandy and stir into flour mixture until well mixed. Knead until dough is smooth and holds together well. Wrap dough in plastic and



chill 30 minutes to an hour.

Unwrap dough and roll on a floured surface until it is a little over 1/8-inch thick. Cut several narrow strips from the rolled dough and set aside. Cut the remainder in circles and place each in a small fluted tart mold, lightly buttered. Press the dough into each, making sure edges extend a bit above the top. Pierce the bottoms once or twice with a fork and spoon a dab of jam into the center of each. Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Filling: Whisk egg yolks lightly until blended and reserve about a teaspoonful. Beat the butter until light and fluffy. Stir in the powdered sugar gradually, then the egg yolks, almonds and almond oil or extract. Combine the flour with the cornstarch and stir into the almond mixture. Beat the egg whites until stiff and fold in gently until blended. Fill pastry shells with almond mixture. Cut the strips of reserved dough into lengths a little shorter than the diameter of the tarts and place a cross of dough on top of each. Mix reserved egg yolk with a few drops of water and brush carefully on the crosses to glaze. Bake for about 20-25 minutes, until pastry is golden.