



There's a Chef in My Kitchen, LLC

## *Pistachio Pear Torta*

Makes 1 8" or 9" cake

*Wander through the streets of any Tuscan villages and inevitably you will smell the sweet warm scent of pastry baking, wafting through the narrow streets of the old cities and villages. This classic country cake, or torta, is the sweet version to its savory cousin, the Italian Pie or the Italian Torta. The ingredients used for the pastry shell are incorporated into the batter giving this cake a pastry-like buttery lightness. In an effort to update this old-world classic, I've traded out traditional pine nut and apple or grape filling, for pistachio and pears, which are prominent in Southern Italian cooking – the Mediterranean influence extending its reach through the Southern parts of Italy and stretching as far north into Rome and the Tuscan region. This recipe is based on an old-world classic that is used often by my friend, and cooking companion, Gabriella, who resides in Florence.*



### **Ingredients:**

*For the torta:*

- 1 tablespoon vegetable shortening
- 1 generous tablespoon flour
- 2 cups all purpose unbleached flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup light brown sugar, gently packed
- Generous pinch of coarse (Kosher) salt (optional, see *Note*)
- 1 ½ sticks (12 tablespoons) butter, cut into small pieces
- ¾ cup milk
- 2 eggs, lightly whisked to combine
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1 cup shelled unsalted roasted pistachios,\* coarsely ground in a food processor
- 2 15 ounce cans sliced pear (preferably packed in juice not syrup), drained and coarsely chopped

*For meringue topping:*

- 2 egg whites
- 2 scant tablespoons sugar

*\*Note: I find it difficult, if not impossible to locate shelled unsalted roasted pistachio nuts in my local markets. I simply use the shelled salted pistachios nuts and omit the salt from the recipe. If you are using unsalted pistachios, add a generous pinch of kosher salt with the flour, sugars and butter at the start of the recipe.*

### **Preparation:**

Preheat the oven to 375 F.

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Grease the inside of an 8- or 9-inch springform pan with the vegetable shortening; add the flour and lightly coat the pan. Set aside.

Place the flour, sugars, salt (if using), and butter into the work bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Process until the mixture resembles coarse meal and sticks together when pressed in between your fingers. Turn out the mixture into a large, mixing bowl. Scoop a generous 1 cup of the mixture from the center of the bowl creating a well in the middle of the mixture. Place the cup into the springform pan and press evenly over the bottom and partially up the sides of the pan. Set the pan aside.

In the well of the crumb mixture, add the milk, the eggs, baking powder, and vanilla. Using a whisk combine these ingredients thoroughly, take care not to incorporate too much of the crumb mixture. Add the zest of the lemon, and the ground pistachio nuts. Use a large wooden spoon or spatula and fold the crumbs, the zest, and the nuts in with the wet ingredients until well blended. Add the pears and gently fold to combine. Turn the batter out into the prepared springform pan. Set aside.

*Make the meringue topping:* Place the egg whites into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a whisk. Whisk on high until the eggs are foamy. Add the sugar. Continue to whisk until soft peaks are beginning to form. Using a spatula, spread the meringue topping over the batter and gently spread out to the edges of the pan.

Bake the cake for 70 to 80 minutes, until a cake testers inserted into the middle of the cake comes out clean. Remove from the oven and set to cool on a wire rack. After about 30 minutes remove the springform pan ring from the cake. Allow to cool to room temperature.

***To Serve:***

Slice and serve warmed, or toasted. Refrigerate covered for up to 1 week.

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