

Nān-é-Nokhodchi | نان نخودچی | Persian Chickpea Flour Cookies



... And in return, Ali's wife would send us chickpea cookies for Norouz. Alenush loved chickpea cookies. She would pick them up one after the other, pop them in her mouth, close her eyes, and say, "Mmmmm...delicious!"...

from "The Space Between Us"
by Zoya Pirzad, 2014



Rooted in tradition, these bite-size, melt-in-your-mouth confections, called *Nān-é-Nokhodchi*, are made from chickpea flour and flavored with cardamom. They are a delightful treat at any time of the year, but they are one of the signature sweets of the Persian New Year celebration. They are easy to make, and the traditional recipe, as detailed below, produces a sweet that is both gluten free and vegan – a rarity among Persian confections.

Nān-é-Nokhodchis are one of the most delicate cookies that I have ever encountered. They are light for their size and their fragile nature calls for gentle handling. Their sheer delicacy makes chewing unnecessary. I recall childhood memories of putting one on my tongue, gently pressing it against the roof of my mouth, at which point it would smoothly crumble, mixing with the saliva, turning into a thick river of deliciousness.

Etymology, History, and Tradition:

Nān-é-Nokhodchi has been present in the Persian confectionary landscape for more than two centuries. For example, there is a high-level recipe for it in a Persian cookbook published around 1835. It is said that it was originated in the city of *Ghazvin* (also Romanized as *Qazvin*) in north-northwest of Iran on the southern base of the *Alborz* range. Ghazvin had been the capital of Iran during the Safavid dynasty between 1555-1598, and is famous for its confectioneries.

The Persian name of this confection, *Nān-é-Nokhodchi*, is a compound word made of two words “نان” [Romanized: *nān*, Translation: bread] and “نخودچی” [Romanized: *nokhodchi*, Translation: little chickpea]. Therefore, the literal translation of the name of this sweet is “chickpea bread.” Why “bread” you may ask? Traditionally speaking, most Persian sweets are on the “very sweet” side of the sweetness scale. For those few not-as-sweet confections, the bread designation has traditionally been used instead of, for example, the “cookie” designation.

Traditionally, *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* are made in a four-leafed clover shape. Interestingly, four-leafed clover shaped cookie cutters or cookie molds are quite rare in North America and Europe – even on Amazon.com!! Not to worry, even Persian home

cooks make *Nān-é-Nokhodchi* in other shapes including five-leaved clover, heart, circular, crescent moon, or even free-form. Regardless of the shape, they are always bite-size between 1 to 1.5 centimeters (~0.4-0.6 inches) tall and between 2 to 2.5 centimeters (~0.8-1.0 inches) across.

Although readily available in Persian confectionary stores all year around, *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* take centerstage during the Persian New Year celebration [Persian: نوروز; Romanized: Norooz; Literal translation: New Day] which begins on the first day of spring (a.k.a. vernal equinox or Spring equinox). Bite-size cookies made from rice, almond, and chickpea flours, along with other Persian sweet delights, are an integral part of *Norooz*.

During Persian New Year celebrations, you will find *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* in two different settings. They will be present as a component of the traditional Persian New Year spread called *Sofreh-é-Haft-Seen* [Persian: سفره هفت سین; Literal Translation: The Spread of Seven Ss – refereeing to a spread that include seven edible ingredients whose Persian name begin with the Persian letter “س” that sounds like the English letter “s.”] They are also one of the most common sweets offered to guests during reciprocal New Year visits to the homes of friends and family.

Usually, these sweets were purchased from a confectionary store where professional confectioners used to sell their *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* tightly packed in one or at most two layers in simple silvery tin boxes.

A Few Words About the Ingredients:

Chickpea Flower – Chickpeas have been a staple legume in Persian cookery landscape for centuries. For example, in one of the oldest surviving Persian cookbooks from 16th century, chickpeas appear as an ingredient in a wide range of savory dishes. Chickpea flour, which is produced from roasted chickpeas, has been used in both savory and sweet Persian food at least since early 19th century.

Two different types of chickpea flour are used in Persian cookery – coarse and fine. Coarse chickpea flour is typically used in savory dishes such as a particular variety of massive meat dumplings called *Kooftah-é-Ārd-é-Nokhodchi* and in some pan-fried meat patties called *Shāmee-é-Ārd-é-Nokhodchi*. A more finely ground chickpea flour is primary used in Persian confections. Both fine and coarse chickpea flours are readily available in Persian, Indian, and Middle Eastern markets as well as through online Persian grocery sources such as [Kalamala Persian Grocery](#), [Sadaf](#), [Persian Basket](#), and [Tavazo](#) – and of course on [Amazon](#).



When measuring chickpea flour, keep in mind that it not only it compacts more than all-purpose flour, but its volume is highly dependent of how many times it has been sifted and on the ambient humidity. In my experiments, a cup of fine chickpea flour weighs anywhere from 90 to 130 grams. Because of this, I highly recommend measuring your chickpea flour by weight.

Fat – Although *Nān-é-Nokhodchi* is simple to make, most Persian acquire their *Nān-é-Nokhodchi* from their favorite local confectioners. Therefore, most Persians are used to the texture and the flavor of *Nān-é-Nokhodchi* as produced by professional confectioners. The recipe that I have provided below produces such a *Nān-é-Nokhodchi*, and which uses solid vegetable fat (e.g., Crisco brand shortening) as do professional confectioners. It produces a texture and flavor that is by far preferred by Iranian natives and members of Persian diaspora around the world. This recipe also produces a sweet that is both gluten free and vegan – somewhat a rarity among Persian confections.

Any brand of solid vegetable shortening will do. Keep in mind that today's Crisco brand shortening, which is readily available in North America, is not the same Crisco of the past. As of 2020, Crisco brand shortening contains no saturated fat and 50% less saturated fat than butter. The best substitute for solid vegetable fat is clarified butter or ghee, particularly if they are in a solid form. The next best substitute is unsalted butter. Since typical unsalted butter contains between 10-20% water, you may want to increase the amount of fat by about 10% compared to what has in the list of the ingredients. The version made with butter will have a slightly different texture compared to version made with solid vegetable fat – you may sense a very slight internal layering caused by evaporation of water in the butter. The least desirable substitute for solid vegetable fat is some sort of neutral liquid vegetable oil.

Slivered Pistachios – Traditionally, a single slivered pistachio is inserted in the top of the middle of the formed *Nān-é-Nokhodchis*. Sprinkling a tiny amount of coarsely ground pistachios is a good substitute for slivered pistachios. Slivered almonds are acceptable substitute for slivered pistachios but won't be as colorful. In some regions of Iran, a completely different approach is taken to garnish these delicate sweets. Instead of inserting a slivered or sprinkling anything, the top of *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* is decorated with a single small drop of steeped liquid saffron. After preparing about a tablespoon steep liquid saffron in a small bowl, use the tip of a wooden toothpick, cake tester, or pointed chopstick to transfer a small drop of steeped liquid saffron from the bowl to the top of each *Nān-é-Nokhodchis*.



A Few Words About the Method:

The detailed instructions below uses a stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment. You can also use an electric hand mixer or simply mix the ingredients by hand. If you decide to use an electric hand mixer or to mix the ingredients by hand, after all the ingredients are well mixed, you may want to knead the dough for 30 second to form a pliable dough before letting it rest in the refrigerator.

In step #8 of the detailed instructions, you are asked to soak the pistachio slivers in a bit of tap water. Although this step is not absolutely necessary, it will help your pistachio slivers preserve their bright green color during the baking period.

In step #9 of the detailed instructions, you are asked to roll out the dough into an even thickness of about 1 centimeter (~ ½ inch). The standard trick for rolling dough into a uniform thickness is to use dowels (or any wooden, plastic, or metal sticks) as guides. Place the dough on a sheet of parchment paper or piece of plastic wrap. Place a second sheet of parchment paper or a second piece of plastic wrap on top. Then place the dowels on either side of the dough. Roll out the dough while resting the rolling pin on the dowels. The dough will be rolled out to the thickness of the dowels.

In step #10 of the detailed instructions, you are asked to dust your cookie cutter by dipping it into a bit of chickpea flour in a small bowl. Although this step is not absolutely necessary, it helps the cut cookie dough fall out of the cookie cutter. If your cookie dough still does not fall out easily from the cookie cutter, you can use the end of a wooden spoon or chopstick to gently push out the cut cookie dough. I have a thick (3 millimeter or 1/8 inch) piece of plastic cut in the shape of my four-leaves clover cookie cutter that I sometimes use (like a piston) to push my cut cookies out of the cookie cutter.

If you decide not to use a cookie cutter to form your *Nān-é-Nokhodchis*, simply form 1.5-centimeter (3/4 inch) round balls of the dough (about 10 grams) by rolling them between your palms. Put the balls on the baking sheet lined with parchment paper, press them down slightly to keep them from rolling, and use the tip of a sharp knife, or the tip of a needle, or the tip of toothpick to make a simple pattern on top of each *Nān-é-Nokhodchi*.

If you decide to garnish your *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* with coarsely ground pistachios, do the garnishing after baking the cookies right after you pull them out of the oven. If you decide to garnish your *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* with a small drop of steeped liquid saffron, do this after the *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* have cooled completely.

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Total Active Time: 1 hour

Dough Rest Time: At least 1 hour; overnight preferred

Cooling Time after Baking: 1 hour

Yield: Approximately 70 bite-size cookies

Ingredients:

Ingredients	Amount	Purchasing and Ingredient Preparation Guidance and/or Pointers to Informative Material
Solid Vegetable Fat	190 gr = 6.7 oz = 1 cup	See the discussion about ingredients above. This amount is equal to 1 stick of Crisco brand shortening.
Confectioners' Sugar	175 gr = 6.2 oz = 1.5 cups	Recommend sifting.
Finely Ground Cardamom	1 tsp = 2 gr = 0.07 oz	To get 1 tsp of finely ground cardamom, you need to finely grind about 0.6 tsp of cardamom seeds. (Yes, volume to weight ratio of ground cardamom is higher than cardamom seeds.)
Fine Chickpea Flour	450 gr = 16 oz ≈ 4 cups (for the dough) Plus, separately, another couple of tablespoons for dusting your cookie cutter	See the discussion about ingredients above. Highly recommend sifting twice and measuring by weight.
Slivered pistachios	5 gr = 0.18 oz ≈ 2 tsp	See the discussion about ingredients above.

Method:

1. Cut the solid vegetable fat into five or six piece and place in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Beat the solid vegetable fat at low speed for 30 seconds. Scrape the sides of the bowl. Continue beating at medium speed for another 30 seconds. Scrape the sides of the bowl.
2. Start the mixer at low speed, while the mixer is running, add confectioners' sugar one heaping spoonful at a time. After all the confectioners' sugar has been added, stop the mixer, and scrape the sides of the bowl. Continue beating at medium speed for another 60 seconds. Scrape the sides of the bowl.
3. Together, twice sift 450 gr of chickpea flour and ground cardamom into a separate bowl.
4. Put the other 2 tablespoon of chickpea flour that you had separated into another separate small bowl.
5. Start the mixer at low speed, while the mixer is running at low speed, add the mixture of chickpea flour and ground cardamom one heaping spoonful at a time. After the entire mixture of chickpea flour and ground cardamom have been added, stop the mixer, and scrape the sides of the bowl. Continue mixing at medium speed for another 30 seconds or until a uniform dough with the consistency of playdough has been formed.
6. Wrap the dough with plastic and let it rest in refrigerator, preferably overnight, but no less than 1 hour.
7. When ready to bake, adjust your oven rack to middle position and preheat 300°F. Prepare a parchment-lined rimmed (or flat) baking sheet.
8. Soak pistachio slivers in tap water in a small bowl until you are needed to use them in Step #13 below.
9. Unwrap the refrigerated dough. Roll out the dough into thickness of approximately 1 centimeter (approximately ½ inch).
10. Dip your cookie cutter into the chickpea flour that you had set aside in the small bowl. Tap the cookie cutter against the rim of the small bowl so excess chickpea flour is dropped back into the bowl.
11. Use the dusted cookie cutter to cut the dough and transfer to the baking sheet. Repeat the process, including dusting the cookie cutter, leaving about ½ centimeter (about ¼ inch) between cookies. The cookies will not expand during baking.
12. Roll the rest of the dough into a ball and knead it for a few seconds. Roll it out and repeat the cookie cutting process.

13. Drain the pistachio slivers that had been soaked. Spread the pistachio slivers over a clean kitchen towel to make it easier to pick them up one at a time.
14. Carefully (I use a tweezer) insert one pistachio sliver into the center of top of each cookie. Do not force the pistachio slivers too far into the cookies.
15. Bake the cookies for approximately 25 minutes. Properly baked cookies will have the same color as the uncooked dough. If cookies start to change color – getting darker – it means that they are starting to overcook.
16. Take the baking sheet out of the oven and place over a cooking rack or a trivet.
17. Let the cookies remain on the baking sheet for at least one hour, not only to cool, but also to form a more solid structure for ease of handling.
18. Gently move one cookie at a time from the baking sheet onto a serving dish.

Your Kitchen Notes:

Minor Flavoring or Preparation Alternatives/Variations:

- There are some home cooks that incorporate about a tablespoon or two of steeped liquid saffron into the dough resulting in *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* that are deep orange with a saffron flavor. There also some home cooks that incorporate a couple of teaspoons of rosewater into the dough. The pure cardamom version, however, is preferred by most Persians.

Vegetarian/Vegan/Gluten-Free Variations:

- Using the ingredients listed above results in a naturally vegan and gluten-free confection.

Make-Ahead, Leftover Use, and Storage Ideas:

- The dough can be made a few days ahead as long as it is stored in the refrigerator, well wrapped with plastic or in an airtight container. The dough is freezer friendly for longer storage periods.
- Using solid vegetable fat results in *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* that have a long shelf life. After a day or two, if there are any left, put them in an airtight container and store in a dark, dry, and cool place or even in the refrigerator. They will stay fresh for several weeks if not a couple of months – there is nothing in them to go rancid.
- *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* are very delicate. Store them in one, or at most two, layers.

Serving Suggestions:

- A few *Nān-é-Nokhodchis* are excellent companion to a cup of hot black tea after any meal, as part of the afternoon teatime, or mid-morning snack.
- During Persian New Year celebrations, you will see them in two different settings. They will be present as a component of the traditional Persian New Year spread called “Sofreh-é-Haft-Seen.” They are also one of the most common sweets that are offered when entertaining guests.
- If you have some friends with Persian heritage, surprise them with your extra ones. These the sweets that will delight them.