

Hamentaschen Cookie a Tasty Part of the Purim Story

By Robyn Taylor, *The Winchester Star*, February 28, 2018.

WINCHESTER — Hamentaschen, a cookie traditionally made for the Jewish holiday of Purim, comes with a backstory complete with a dastardly villain and a beautiful heroine.

Purim is a minor holiday in the Jewish faith — people still go to work and school — but it's a festive one.

Purim celebrations call for dressing up in costumes, playing games and eating hamentaschen (sometimes spelled hamantaschen).

“Some people refer to Purim as the Jewish Halloween,” said Ellen Zimmerman, a member of Beth El Congregation on Fairmont Avenue.

The holiday begins tonight and ends Thursday evening.

The children of Beth El Congregation will celebrate this weekend with a party at which they'll make hamentaschen and play games including a version of pin the hat on Haman — the bad guy in the story.

The origins of Purim can be found in the book of Esther in the Bible.

Esther was a beautiful Jewish woman who caught the eye of King Ahasuerus of Persia. He made her his queen, but he didn't know she was Jewish.

Meanwhile, one of the king's advisers, Haman, was plotting to destroy all the Jews. When Esther learned of Haman's plan, she put herself at risk by going to the king and interceding on her people's behalf. The king decided to spare the Jewish people and instead had Haman killed.

The book of Esther is read aloud during Purim, and every time Haman's name is spoken, everyone boos and shakes a noisemaker, called a gragger.

"The day is full of festivity and humor," said Zimmerman, who provides short history lessons, recipes and information on traditional customs on her website Jewish Holidays in a Box (jewishholidaysinabox.com)

The hamentaschen cookie eaten during Purim is shaped like a three-corner hat — the sort of hat that Haman might have worn.

The dough is rolled out and cut into circles then filled with a sweet treat, traditionally poppy seeds or prunes.

Modern-day versions are filled with any flavor of jam, peanut butter, even Nutella.

"Nutella is climbing the ranks of popularity," said Zimmerman, who took a poll of popular hamentaschen flavors on her website.

As a girl Zimmerman made hamentaschen with her mother and then with her two daughters after she became a mother. Now, she makes it with her young grandsons.

On a recent baking playdate, Zimmerman's grandsons made hamentaschen with apples and peanut butter as well as orange marmalade and raspberry and strawberry jams.

Below, Zimmerman shares two of her mother's recipes for hamentaschen dough.

Zimmerman prefers the first recipe when she bakes with her grandsons because it makes a smaller number of cookies, and she doesn't know how long the activity of baking cookies will hold their attention.

Both doughs need to be chilled a couple hours before assembling the cookies, she said.

And instead of rolling out the dough with a pin, Zimmerman advises rolling the dough into the size of golf balls and then patting the cookies flat with your hand. Make sure to spread flour on the work surface or the dough will stick.

Fill the cookies with a scant teaspoon of the filling of your choice and then pinch or fold into a three-sided “hat.”

Good luck with the pinching. The technique of folding the cookies into three neat corners takes a bit of practice.

Sometimes the cookies can look like a hat that’s been shaken into submission by the family dog.

“But, really, what does it matter,” Zimmerman said. “It’s supposed to be a fun day.”

Hamentaschen Recipe No. 1

3 1/2 cups sifted flour

1 cup sugar

3/4 cup salad oil

1 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 teaspoon baking powder

3 eggs, lightly beaten

1 teaspoon vanilla or almond extract

Sift dry ingredients together. Make a well and add oil, eggs, and vanilla. Mix well. Cover and refrigerate for several hours or overnight. Cut dough into thirds. Roll each piece into

a sheet about 1/8-inch thick. Flour so it will not stick. Use a 3-inch diameter cutter. Put a rounded teaspoonful of the filling into the center. Form triangle. Put on ungreased cookie sheet and bake at 350 degrees for about 15 to 20 minutes.

Hamentaschen Recipe No. 2

1/2 cup vegetable oil

3 eggs

1/2 cup cold water

juice of 2 lemons

1 1/2 cups sugar

pinch of salt

rind of 1 orange, grated

3 teaspoon baking powder

6 cups of flour

In large mixing bowl, mix together oil, eggs, water, lemon juice, sugar, salt, and orange rind. Into another bowl, sift together baking powder and flour. Add the dry ingredients to the oil-egg mixture slowly, kneading in flour a cup or so at a time. Chill dough for several hours or overnight.