

Sugarplums

Ingredients

- Nuts (chopped and toasted)
 - ¼ C hazelnuts, skinless (finely chopped)
 - ¼ C pecans (coarsely chopped) [Try more pecan and less walnut.]
 - ½ C walnuts (coarsely chopped)
- • Fruit (chopped)
 - ¼ C cranberries, dried (coarsely chopped)
 - ½ C dates, pitted (coarsely chopped)
 - 1 t orange zest (finely chopped) [Try other citrus as well.]
 - ¼ C prunes (finely chopped) [This is the “plum” aspect.]
- 2 T cherry preserves [This is your binder; and yes, do try such alternatives as apricot and so on, but maybe err on the tart side.]
- **Optional:** small amounts of an extract, such as ¼ t of vanilla
- Spices (ground)
 - ½ t cinnamon
 - ⅛ t cloves
 - ⅛ t nutmeg
- ½ C sugar (of some crunchy type or other, i.e., not powdery... sanding sugar is a lot of fun, and granulated sinks in kinda fast)

Directions

1. If you really want to handle this recipe from scratch (and you're not in *any* sort of a hurry), then start by drying the cranberries (as it can take several many hours or even days, depending upon your method); otherwise, just buy them that way.
2. Toast the nuts. Heat the oven to 325° F (~160° C). Spread them on a baking sheet and leave them in the oven for ~12 minutes, just enough to toast them a bit. (This should suit your taste, but as they say in the old country, “Burnt nuts are bitter.”) Now, these nuts toast at *about* the same rate (especially the pecans and walnuts as their size and fat content is about the same); however, hazelnuts *can* take a couple minutes more, so *if* you are going to remove the skins yourself *anyway*, then you might as well toast them by themselves.

3. Chop the nuts and fruit to the coarseness specified above. Do not pulverize as this mixture will provide the texture for the sugarplum bite.
4. In a food processor, using a chopping blade, pulse (a few times) the combined mass of the nuts and fruit (but not the cherry preserves).
5. If you have more of a mixing blade for your food processor (i.e., a duller plastic one that is more like a dough blade), then switch to it. Add the cherry preserves, the spices (cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg... not the sugar), and the extract (if you decide to use it); moreover, you might want to add these sort of spread out over the mass so that less pulsing will get it distributed well. (Sometimes I use a big bowl and a wooden spoon instead.) Pulse enough times to start creating a dough. Stop when the mass passes the pinch test (i.e., it holds its shape when you press a bit of it together).
6. Roll the dough into balls of 1-inch diameter (~2.5cm).
7. Cover each ball in the crunchy sugar (generally by rolling it around in a pile).
8. Chill these airtight in the fridge.
9. Enjoy visions of them dancing in your head and say, "Okay, now I get it."