

12. NUTCAKES

Here is the recipe for nut cakes – it's actually Greek rather than Roman, but I would think the Romans had something like it. The recipe comes from *'The Deipnosophistia'*, or *Sophists At Dinner* by Athenaeus and it is attributed to his friend Chrysippus, a founder of the Stoic doctrine. Quite a pedigree for what is basically a sweetie!

This makes 24 pieces

2 oz (55g) shelled hazelnuts	4oz (115g) thick honey
2oz (55g) shelled walnuts	2oz (55g) sesame seeds
4oz (115g) blanched almonds	poppy seeds

Place all the nuts in a tin and roast in a hot oven or under the grill, watching carefully, until toasted brown. (I found that the different nuts brown at a very different intervals and are best toasted separately). Grind them coarsely through a parsley mill or nut grater into a bowl. (I did them in my food processor on 'pulse').

Put the honey in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Remove from heat and cool slightly. Add sufficient honey to the ground nuts to make a soft mass. With floured hands, shape the mixture into two flattish round 'cakes'. (This is very messy and sticky).

Toast the sesame seeds under the grill and, when cooled, mix with the remaining honey until the mixture is the same consistency as the nut cakes, then shape and flatten in the same way to a 'cake' of similar size. Sprinkle the sides and top of this cake with poppy seeds and gently press them in.

Sandwich the sesame seed cake between the other two layers and press together gently.

(I found that the easiest way to do this was to put the lot between two layers of baking parchment and press them together lightly but firmly with a rolling pin.

Store in a tin for two days before serving to let the cake firm up and then cut into fudge sized cubes. The nut cake will keep for at least a week but it is delicious and is unlikely to last that long uneaten!