

Tried & tasted

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Prince



Our weekly column sources the best gadgets, shops and food. Today: **Easter treats**

Birds, lambs, rabbits, flowers and budding trees: the explosion of new life at Easter inspires the year's sweetest cakes and biscuits. I love a fruity English Simnel cake, with the apostles represented in sweet almond paste balls, and there is none better or more beautifully made than at Daylesford Organic's kitchen in Gloucestershire.

It's a high, fruity but light cake, made with dark brown sugar, raisins, sultanas and currants and flavoured with citrus and Earl Grey tea. The surface is covered with natural marzipan, and the "apostles" are piled in the centre of the cake (900g cake, £14.99).

Daylesford also sells a child-pleasing basket containing bite-sized bunny-shaped biscuits (100g, £4.95) plus plenty of chocolate eggs and an Easter lamb box containing all you need for the festive meal (£40 for four people). Home delivery is available.

Astonishing Easter treats with their ancestry in Germany can be found in East Lothian, at the Falko Konditormeister in Gullane (with a second shop in Edinburgh). Highly skilled baker Falko Brukert is a master at making *Baumkuchen* (tree cake), a coiled cake with a hole in

the centre, cooked in a special belt-driven pre-war machine, rather like a spit roast. When sliced (thinly is recommended), the interior resembles the cross section of a tree.

For Easter, Brukert fills the central hole with sugar bunnies cast in 100-year-old moulds. The cake crumb has crunchy lumps of caramel within, and is a beautiful yellow, thanks to eggs from chickens organically reared just outside Edinburgh on the Cyrenians Farm.

Many of the bakery's ingredients are sourced locally, with flour milled in Scotland and spelt from Gilchester Organics, over the border. Also for Easter, Brukert makes an *Osterlamm* sponge cake in the shape of a lamb – light textured as a Madeira cake.

Every corner of Europe seems to throw up an eccentric speciality. Many come in the form of flora or fauna, but some are just simply extraordinary. Having tasted *amaretti di gallarate* from the Gnocchi bakery in Varese, northern Italy, all other softish-centred almond cakes sold here in Britain seem harder than Winalot.

The Gnocchi *amaretti* have a pale, rocky yet fragile outer shell and the

softest, lightest paste inside. (Giorgio Locatelli, an Italian chef working in Britain, serves them with mascarpone whipped with a little sugar and a spoonful of grappa.) They have just arrived in Selfridges Food Hall, £19.99 for a 500g ribboned box.

The range of Italian Easter cakes, biscuits and sweets is vast. Some of the best are to be found at Carluccio's, whose many treasures are also available online. Its *colomba tradizionale*, a yeast-leavened, sultana cake shaped like a dove, is made in Italy at an artisan bakery using natural ingredients, then wrapped simply with decorated paper and white ribbon. Light textured but rich with egg yolk, it's best with chocolate, strawberry and vanilla ice cream.

Carluccio's simple, buttery *fiorellini* (flower biscuits) are delicious alongside an iced-coffee granita. It also sells praline-filled and sugared chocolate eggs, plus jolly foil-wrapped Caffarel fish, each containing a treat.

Lastly, a curiosity for travellers: I recommend a visit to I Peccatucci di Mamma Andrea in Palermo, Sicily, where you can find the weirdest Easter sweets of all; *pasta reale*, marzipan effigies in the

form of sacrificial lambs, filled with chopped pistachio and shredded, candied pumpkin. Engaging smiles are hand-painted onto their faces by Mamma Andrea and her assistants, and each carries a historic red-and-gold Easter flag. The shop can be found on the Via Principe di Scordia 67, Palermo.

Where to buy

- Daylesford Organic, www.daylesfordorganic.com
- Cyrenians Farm, www.cyreniansfarm.org.uk
- Falko Konditormeister: 185 Bruntsfield Place, Edinburgh and 1 Stanley Road, Gullane. 0131 656 0763 or visit www.falko.co.uk
- Gilchester Organics, www.gilchesters.com
- Selfridges, www.selfridges.com
- Carluccio's, www.carluccios.com (last order date April 20)
- I Peccatucci di Mamma Andrea, www.mammaandrea.it





AMANA IMAGES INC/ALAMY; BLUEMAGENTA/LAMY

Continental flavour: Osterlamm, top, and Baumkuchen

