

I made Swedish-American Farmer Cookies this morning. Similar to what were called “icebox cookies,” though that designation in my newer cookbooks has been updated to “refrigerator cookies,” the ones I made this morning started yesterday, when I mixed the dough and formed it into long, slender rolls to chill before baking.

The name of these small, crisp, buttery rounds is my adaptation of the original “bondkakor.” That word means “farmer cookies” in Swedish, but I had to add the “American” not because I made them for a Swedish-American farmer, although I did, but because I had changed the recipe in a way that made the cookies uniquely “American,” though “Canadian” would also have been appropriate.

This is because I replaced the sugar in the recipe with granulated maple sugar, and the tablespoon of syrup—in Sweden cane syrup, in the U.S. dark corn syrup—with maple syrup. In addition to giving the cookies a slightly different flavor, using maple sugar gave me one more ingredient for which I could substitute home grown for “store-bought.”

We use a lot of Swedish baking recipes, some of which we change a little—such as I did with the cookies I made this morning—and others that we leave just as they are printed—and often pictured—in the small red and white checked book called *Sju Sorters Kakor*. This baking book is a standard in Swedish kitchens, and the one I have celebrated the 60th year of the book’s life. A gold seal on the cover imparts the information that it is “Sweden’s most purchased book, 3.4 million copies sold.” Some recipes are dropped from edition to edition, and others added, but primarily, the book is filled with the standard cookies, rolls, cakes, and breads that most Swedes recognize—or, at least, would have until recent years when many people stopped baking, just as they have done here.

But, a few years ago, a little twist developed in my story. My niece called one day to tell about a gift she had received from a friend. It was a small, red and white checked book called *Swedish Cakes and Cookies*. So, I expected that some of the same recipes would be in the book, probably adapted somewhat to American ingredients, and perhaps, selected for American cooking methods.

I grabbed my *Sju Sorters Kakor* from the shelf and we began to compare recipes. As we checked page after page, we soon realized that this was no adaptation. Nothing had been changed. Her *Swedish Cakes and Cookies* was the very same baking book I had, just an English translation. Even the pictures were the same, and the recipes appeared on the same pages in both books.

It wasn’t long before another friend had purchased a copy of the book in English. We are in a group that meets weekly, and the hostess provides some refreshments to go along with tea or coffee. It is not uncommon that Joanne’s baked goods have come directly from her *Swedish Cakes and Cookies*, and we laugh and say, “page 123.” The same conversation occurs when we meet at our cabin.

Some of the recipes in the book were familiar to me from the time I spent

with Runo's mother, Gunborg, in her kitchen in Sweden. Occasionally, the name was different, as she had baked a certain bar or cookie for years but not given it the same name. And, the baking book even explains that. One recipe I often use is for "snoddas," a bar that is minimally flavored with chocolate, has coffee in the icing, and is strewn with lots of unsweetened, fine, dry coconut. Gunborg made these bars, too, and they were always my favorites. But, she called them "kärleksmums," or "love mums." When I found the recipe in my copy of *Sju Sorters Kakor*, I saw that the recipe was introduced with a paragraph that read: "A popular bar with many names, such as mocha bars, coffee cake, everyday bars, and sheet pan bars." My little book opens automatically to that recipe, since I have used it so many times.

I like cookbooks and baking books, and I read them as avidly as I do novels. Libraries often have the cookbooks on the shelves that one might like to use, but not invest in for the home kitchen library. I tried several recipes for the thin Swedish ginger cookies called "pepparkakor," and finally settled on one I discovered in a library cookbook. I hate to be disloyal, but I must admit that the recipe I found in the library is a lot more satisfactory with the ingredients we use than the one in *Sju Sorters Kakor*.

One ingredient in many Swedish baking recipes is not common here. *Hjorthornssalt*, literally translated as "elkhornsalt," is sold here in some specialty stores and by mailorder, as "baker's ammonia." A friend sends me what I need for certain cookie recipes. Halfway through the baking process, if one opens the oven door, a powerful ammonia odor makes the eyes water, but when the baking is completed, the smell is gone, and the resulting cookies are porous with a delicately appealing consistency. *Hjorthornssalt* is worth locating for certain recipes. Gunborg did chuckle, though, when she told me to open the oven door to check on the cookies called "dreams." I nearly fell over. But, when I tasted the final result, I knew that these were destined to be some of my favorite cookies.

So, with the holiday season soon on its way, I will open *Sju Sorters Kakor* often, and I expect that Laura and Joanne will also consult *Swedish Cakes and Cookies* from time to time, too. And now, it is time to put on the coffeepot and arrange on a plate some Swedish-American Farmer Cookies with the flavor of home and the faint aroma of our own maple sugar.