

Great British Bake Off Episode 2 – Tips from the Scottish Women’s Institutes (SWI) On Biscuit Making

After the drama of the opening week with tension, tears and troubles, and the first farewell - to musician Stu who didn’t quite manage to rise to the occasion – the new series of the Great British Bake Off is shaping up to be compelling Wednesday night viewing.

It’s not just judges Paul Hollywood and Mary Berry who can offer up expert comment and advice – members of the Scottish Women’s Institutes (SWI) have some top tips to offer up.

The second episode is set to feature biscotti, arlette puff pastry biscuits and an edible biscuit box filled with biscuits of different flavours and the SWI’s Mary Young, Stirling Clackmannan and West Perth (SCWP) vice chairman, has some guidance for anyone wishing to bake a better biscuit.

Mary says that while simple in composition, biscuits can be surprisingly prone to baking problems because they cook so quickly.

She says: “Don’t overcrowd biscuits on a baking sheet or in the oven – the air needs to circulate right round them.

“If you are cooking more than one sheet, be prepared to have them bake at different speeds – watch them closely for uneven cooking.”

When it comes to pastry making, Mary says this benefits from having all its ingredients cold – and that includes hands and boards.

“Once mixed, pastry should be ‘rested’ in the fridge for at least half an hour,” she adds. “This allows fats to solidify and the gluten in the pastry to relax.”

To create a biscuit box, opt for a melted biscuit recipe, ie one containing syrup like gingerbread, which can be trimmed to shape whilst hot and will firm up when cold to form a rigid box. Creating different flavours of biscuits is an interesting challenge for the bakers.

“They have such a wide choice of biscuits to choose from, therefore probably best to limit to six varieties and to make them small and dainty to fit into the box.”

The SWI has recently undergone a rebranding exercise to attract and engage new generations of Scottish Women to learn and share skills in an atmosphere of fun and friendship. Flexible meetings at different times of the day and in different venues are helping the SWI become more accessible and relevant to women who work, have family and busy lifestyles.

New Institutes are encouraged to take up themes and activities that reflect their own interests, lifestyles and communities, alongside existing SWI groups where education and training in home skills, family welfare, citizenship and friendship remain the key aims. Baking and crafts remain among the most popular activities but they now exist alongside activities such as fascinators making, cocktail classes and musical tribute nights.

With less formal minute taking new institutes are using social media to communicate with members. These pilot meetings complement the existing network of traditional meetings that have been held all over Scotland since the organisation's foundations in 1917.

Earlier this year, the SWI dropped 'Rural' from its name, unveiled a new logo and motto, 'Women Together' and launched a new website.

For more details of how to find your nearest institute, or advice on how to set up a new one, visit www.theswi.org.uk or go to its Facebook pages at <https://www.facebook.com/ScottishWomensInstitutes>.

Episode Two of The Great British Bake Off will air on Wednesday (12th August) at 8pm on BBC One.

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