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SUGAR COATED ALMONDS

May 26, 2010

There is a very old tradition here in France to offer sugar-coated almonds - known as dragées - when a child is born. They are actually traditionally given out at baptism, but as there are not that many baptisms around anymore, I think it is a great tradition to carry on to celebrate the arrival of a new little person.

When I was born dragées only existed in pink and blue and white. My mother searched the whole of France for some green ones (she had a very May 68 approach to colour type casting of genders, which did not mix very well with something so traditional as dragéés). The tradition goes back as far as the 12th century when an apocathery figured out that almonds lasted longer if sealed in a coat of sugar. Almonds were reputed to combat sterility - hence the tradition of offering them to celebrate a baby.

Now you find them in all shapes and sizes and qualities. LaDurée makes some delicious ones, and you can equally get big bags for a few euros in the wedding shops on boulevard Magenta by metro Barbés Rochechouart, here in Paris. You can even now get M&M dragées, though I would not count these as something traditionally french... A dragée can be incredibly delicious or absolutely horrible, depending on the ones you get, so I highly recommend tasting them before buying.

- Emilie

P.S. I was just talking on the phone to my Italian Stepmother about these - apparently in Italy Dragées are called Confetti - and are used in exactly the same way!

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