

# Cardamom: the secret spice that makes these cookies come alive



Photo Susie Iventosch

**Daughter Courtney sneaks a Cardamom & Currant Oatmeal Cookie.**

**By Susie Iventosch**

I am a huge fan of oatmeal cookies and these are my absolute favorite! They are full

of currants, nuts, and yummy spices – cinnamon, allspice, and cardamom – the best spice on the planet. Cardamom is the secret ingredient that makes these cookies

come alive. If you're not familiar with it, it's a spice that comes from the seed pods of various plants in the ginger family, but it tastes nothing at all like ginger. It has a distinctly lovely scent and it adds such a wonderful taste to sweet and savory dishes alike. It's a bit pricey, but it also lasts a long time and you can use it in other baked goodies and curry dishes, too. It's a key component to a lot

of Swedish baked goods.

These oatmeal cookies are soft and stay that way even days after baking them. It's funny because I usually like crispy, crunchy cookies, but for me, oatmeal cookies have to be soft. The trick to keeping them soft is reconstituting the currants (or raisins if you prefer them) in boiling water before adding them to the cookie dough. This keeps the cookies soft for days and

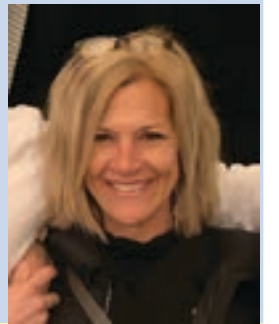
it keeps the currants or raisins from drying out while baking. You are gonna love these gems!

We usually make the cookies to order at our house, meaning we refrigerate the dough and bake a batch at a time. If you like to bake the entire batch at once, these cookies freeze very well, but if you have a flock of people around, they won't last long anyway. Enjoy!

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 cubes butter (1 cup or 8 oz.) at room temp
- 1 1/2 cups light brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 large eggs
- 1 2/3 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 teaspoon cardamom
- 3/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon allspice
- 2 cups old fashioned oats (can use quick oats, too)
- 1 cup currants (or raisins or a combination)
- 1/2 cup walnuts or pecans coarsely chopped (optional)

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Preheat oven to 350 F. Prepare a cookie sheet with cooking spray or parchment paper.

Place currants (or raisins) in a small bowl and pour about 1 cup boiling water over them. Allow them to sit and soak for about 15 minutes. This plumps them up and allows them to stay moist while baking. After 15 minutes, wring out the excess water by squeezing them in cheesecloth or through a strainer. Discard the liquid and set the currants aside.

In a large mixing bowl, beat butter and sugar together until fluffy with an electric mixer. Add vanilla and eggs and beat until thoroughly blended.

Sift dries (flour, soda, salt, cinnamon, cardamom, allspice) and add to butter mixture. Mix well. Add raisins, nuts, and oatmeal.

Drop by large spoonful or cookie scoop onto a greased baking sheet. Bake in a 350-degree oven for 10-12 minutes or until golden brown. Cool on a baking rack. Store in an airtight container.

## Saint Mary's Performing Arts presents musical theater mashup, April 20-23

**Submitted by Benjamin Enos**

The Saint Mary's College Performing Arts Department and Theatre Program proudly present an original musical theater mashup, "Willow and Houston Throw the Grad Party of the F\*cking Century."

Conceived, written, and performed by members of the class of 2023, "Willow and Houston..." features original material written by Julian Villegas, combined with songs,

scenes, and monologues from contemporary plays and musicals. Seniors Skyelar Clouse and Gabriella Thomas round out the dramaturgy, playwriting and editing team, and all three appear in the production, which will run April 20-23 at SMC's LeFevre Theatre.

Other senior Theatre majors collaborating on this capstone project include Kenji Costantini, who performs in the production; Kendra Eisenmann, co-costume coordinator and performer; Xavier Romero who performs the title charac-

ter of Houston; Torren Valera, sound designer; and Miranda Vega, stage manager.

"'Willow and Houston...' unfolded out of the students' inmost desires," said the faculty advisor for the project, Associate Professor Deanna Zibello. "After years of separation from one another and expectations turned upside down, these seniors wanted nothing more than to create one cohesive project together – and to make audiences forget about their cares, and laugh." In this all-too-relatable

tale, twins Willow and Houston are throwing a graduation party, and Willow needs it to be perfect. But when old high school enemies show up uninvited, nothing goes as planned. Featuring songs from beloved contemporary musicals like "Spring Awakening" and "Jagged Little Pill." "Willow and Houston..." asks the question, how can we cope with an uncertain future in a time of change?

Finally, SMC students are mentored and advised in their work by a team of expert fac-

ulty and professional guest artists, including Directing Mentor Mike DiSalvo, and Musical Director Patrick Burns.

Tickets: \$8 SMC students; \$12 SMC faculty and staff, non-SMC students; \$15 general. Purchase tickets online at [www.stmarys-ca.edu/willow-houston](http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/willow-houston). For ADA and other information, contact Performing Arts Coordinator and Events Manager Tara Sundy at 925-631-4670 or [tms8@stmarys-ca.edu](mailto:tms8@stmarys-ca.edu)

## Bay Area Studio Artists' exhibit opens at THT Gallery



Photo provided

**Submitted by Jenny Rosen**

The city of Lafayette's Public

Art Committee invites the public to the exhibit "A Show of Hands" by the Bay Area Studio Artists (BASA). This exhibit of acrylic and oil paintings high-

lights the wonder of hands as explored by the eight members of the BASA, a group of painters who have been showing their work together since

2010. They work in a wide-ranging mix of subject matter and styles. All of the artists are present or past residents of Lafayette and nearby commu-

nities. This eclectic exhibition is on view through May 4 at the Town Hall Theatre Gallery (3535 School Street). BASA has previously exhibited at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, the Art Gallery at the Orinda Library, The Village Theater Art Gallery in Danville, The Marilyn Citron O'Rourke Gallery at the Benicia Library, the Aspen Surgery Center at John Muir Hospital, Orinda Books, Main Street Arts Gallery in Martinez, the Napa City Library, and other wine country venues. More information about the Bay Area Studio Artists can be found at [bayareastudioartists.com](http://bayareastudioartists.com).

## Oscar-nominated international film opens at Orinda Theatre



Photo provided

**By Sophie Braccini**

It was hard for any movie to beat German film "All Quiet on the Western Front" for the International Film Oscar this year, but contender "Close" also deserves to be celebrated. The movie from Belgium (in French and Dutch) brings an unusual touch of poetry and

finesse to a complex topic. The rhythm, the beauty of the imagery, the remarkable acting by everyone, makes this heart-breaking film a definite must-see. It will show in Orinda from April 21 for at least one week.

The story written and directed by filmmaker Lukas Dhont (his first film, "Girl," won Camera d'Or at the 2018

Cannes Film festival) is a very personal story that paints the friendship between two boys, Léo and Rémi, as they transition between the innocence of childhood and the difficult years of middle school. Two friends, united like two brothers in a communion of spirit, share their games, their joys, their care-free time. But as they enter middle school, the eyes of others are quick to label their closeness and end their innocence. One of them, Léo, will react by joining the hockey team and distancing himself from his friend. The catastrophe that will ensue will change their lives forever.

In an interview for the Hambourg Film Fest, Dhont explained that he wanted to paint a friendship between two young boys that is very intimate and full of love. "We are used to seeing friendships between girls that are very deep and passionate and we are not

used to seeing that in boys," said Dhont, who put a lot of himself in both main characters of this movie. He explained that as a youngster he did not identify with the group of girls or of the boys, but that he created a distance with the boys who wanted to be close to him because he did not want the sexual label. His movie pays homage to the friends he lost. "Friendships define who we are and an abrupt breakage can stay with us for a long time," he added.

"Close" paints the violent reality of middle school pressure to belong with subtlety and elegance. It remains soft in spite of the tough topic it addresses. The closeness to nature, the beautiful rhythm of the seasons that is evoked throughout creates the deep and respectful mood that permeates throughout movie. It is an impressionist movie with a dark serious undertone.

Dhont also has a gift for choosing and leading his actors to inhabit his vision. Eden Dambrine as Léo and Gustav De Waele as Rémy were chosen by Dhont, who asked of them to really get to know each other, so when it came time to act, things were natural. By the same token, once he chose the two mothers – Léa Drucker and Emilie Dequenne – he asked them to do everyday life activities with their "sons," such as baking a cake. The two women are consummate professionals and Dequenne's performance is especially superb. Dambrine, a youngster that Dhont met in a train, is so true, vulnerable and strong, deeply moving.

This beautiful coming-of-age film is brought to Lamorinda by the local nonprofit International Film Showcase and will open at the Orinda Theatre on April 21. Tickets at <https://www.orindamovies.com/>