Grandma Obrigewitsch's Sugar Kuchen

9 cups all-purpose flour  
2 cups granulated sugar, divided  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1 teaspoon ground anise or anise extract  
1-1/2 cups lard  
4 eggs  
2 cups (1 pint) whipping cream

In large bowl, combine flour, 1-1/2 cups sugar, salt, baking powder, baking soda and ground anise (if used). Cut in lard. In separate bowl, mix eggs, whipping cream and anise extract (if used); mix into flour mixture. Work dough to a pliable consistency. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap; chill for several hours or overnight.

Make Date Filling. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Divide dough in half. On a 16x14-inch or larger ungreased cookie sheet, roll out half of dough to a 14x12-inch rectangle that is 1/4-inch thick. Spread Date Filling evenly over the top. Roll the remaining dough on parchment to the same size as the bottom and 1/4-inch thick. Use parchment to lift and position dough on top of date filling; peel off parchment. Pinch outside edges together. Sprinkle remaining 1/2 cup sugar on top. Bake at 350 degrees for about 35 minutes or until top is light brown. Place cookie sheet on wire cooling rack to cool. Cut into bars. Makes about 6 dozen, depending on size.

Variation: Bake without the filling by rolling dough to 1/2-inch thickness on cookie sheet. Sprinkle with 1/2 cup granulated sugar. Bake until top is light brown.

Note: Ground anise can be purchased at spice specialty stores.

Date Filling

1 pound chopped pitted dates  
1 cup granulated sugar  
1 cup water

In medium saucepan, combine dates, sugar and water; bring to a boil, then cook on low heat until mixture reduces to a smooth consistency. Stir often.