

CHRISTMAS COOKIE



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**I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO MY
MOTHER, MARIA.**

*She was the one who fueled my passion
for baking Christmas cookies. Mother, not
a day goes by that I don't think of you.*



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Introduction

BOTH OF MY PARENTS WERE GOOD COOKS AND BAKERS, but when it came to baking cookies, my mother was the best. Oh, how I miss those days of coming home from school to the smell of freshly baked cookies. I'd spend the rest of the day up to my eyeballs in sprinkles and sweet icing. Baking Christmas cookies was even more fun as there were more types of cookies available for decorating and munching on. I can still see lots of red and green sugar everywhere. Heaps of white coconut were like mountains of snow that were surrounded by rivers of melted chocolate for dipping. Scents of cinnamon, vanilla, and citrus filled our home. I remember the very best cookies were always the warm ones I sneaked off of the cooling racks.

All of these Christmas cookie memories and more can be yours, too. Recipes are handed down from one generation to the next, and many a family tradition is formed around making them. It's a wonderful way to honor your roots, especially during the holidays.

If you don't have any special recipe traditions, adopt one by choosing a cookie from this book to get started. Baking Christmas cookies is the perfect family activity. There is something for everyone to do—from making the dough to decorating the finished product. More meaningful memories will be formed making cookies than watching a movie together. Having a large group of people to your house for the Christmas holidays? Wouldn't it be nice to have a variety of cookies to offer them? One sure way to get different cookies without having to bake them all yourself is to hold a cookie swap—one of easiest parties you'll ever host.

Use this book to learn the basics of making cookies and to inspire new Christmas cookie traditions. Try new recipes and don't be afraid to try new methods. Once you master cookies, you can get the hang of any type of baking. Make every day Christmas by making your own homemade Christmas cookies any day of the year.





CHAPTER ONE

The Christmas Cookie eBook

In this chapter, you'll find everything you need to know about making Christmas cookies. Once you've absorbed this information, you're ready to tackle any of the recipes found in these pages. Start out with how to read a recipe and how to measure the ingredients. Learn about the different ways of combining ingredients and what to do once they are combined. Baking, cooling, and cookie storage are also covered. You'll find plenty of ideas for decorating your Christmas cookies that go way beyond colored sugar and sprinkles. Learn about icing, piping, painting, and more. Use the ingredient list as a guide to stock your pantry so you can get baking whenever you wish, and use the equipment list to take a baking inventory. You'll also discover steps for hosting a cookie swap, creative ways to display your cookies, and tips for giving cookies as gifts.

Holiday Prep: Sugar, Butter, and Sprinkles

Making cookies is a snap—if you're prepared to do it. Being prepared is the one sure way to make your Christmas cookie baking experience a success. The first step is to familiarize yourself with the recipe. What ingredients and equipment are needed? How much time will it take to bake the cookies? What type of cookies are they, and what methods are used to make them? Once you've gathered the ingredients, how are they measured? Different ingredients require different measurement techniques. Learn everything you need to know, and before long, it will be second nature. Baking cookies, especially Christmas cookies, should be fun!

Read the Recipe

You'll find that all of the recipes in this cookbook are formatted in a similar manner, but other recipes and other cookbooks may be laid out differently. That's why it is important to carefully read a recipe before you begin. To make sure I have all of the necessary ingredients, I read over a recipe several times before making it. Someone may have used all of the eggs to make breakfast that morning. Was that baking *soda* or baking *powder*? I also do it to visualize myself making the recipe. This helps to ensure I have the necessary equipment, too. Besides looking at the ingredients and equipment, make sure to note the timing. A cookie may bake in 30 minutes, but the beginning of the recipe may say the dough should be made the day before.

Recipe Measurements 101

To get the best-tasting and best-looking cookies, you must properly measure the ingredients. A friend shared that a batch of cookies she baked did not rise at all. She said the last time she had made them, all she could taste was the baking soda, so she left it out. We looked at her recipe together and discovered that she thought the recipe was calling for 2 tablespoons of baking soda when only 2 teaspoons were needed!

Dry Ingredients

Flour, confectioners' sugar, brown sugar, granulated sugar, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and spices are most of the dry ingredients found in a cookie recipe. They should be measured using dry measuring cups and spoons (see [Tools and Equipment](#)).

Flour and confectioners' sugar are measured in the same manner. As they are light and airy, they need to be handled gently and not scooped out of the container with a measuring cup. To retain their airiness, use a teaspoon to fill the measuring cup over the brim. Using the flat edge of the spoon handle, cut across the top of the measuring cup, allowing the excess flour or confectioners' sugar to fall back into its container.

Even though brown sugar has a moist texture, it needs to be packed into a dry measuring cup. Spoon the brown sugar into the measuring cup, using the

spoon to press down after each addition. The measurement is complete when the brown sugar is flat and even with the rim of the cup.

Granulated sugar can be scooped out of its container with a dry measuring cup until the cup is full and the top is level. The other dry ingredients are measured with measuring spoons. Scoop the dry ingredient with the measuring spoon and level off the top.

Wet Ingredients

Wet ingredients include water, milk, and oil. These are measured in a “wet” measuring cup made of clear glass or plastic. Hold the cup at eye level to make sure the amount you add is correct. It may look like the right amount if you’re looking down on it, but there may not be enough. Flavored extracts can be measured using measuring spoons. One of my favorite finds is a liquid measurer that looks like a shot glass; I find it much easier to use than measuring spoons. The side of the glass has measurements in teaspoons, tablespoons, ounces, and milliliters. The most it holds is 2 tablespoons.

Weight versus Volume

In baking above all other cooking, it’s important that the ingredients are measured as specified in the recipe. If amounts are not precise, your cookies won’t rise or they may taste “off.” When flour is measured in a dry measuring cup, you’re actually measuring the volume of the flour, not the weight. One cup of all-purpose flour weighs 4½ ounces or 120 grams. The recipes in this book are all written according to the US system of measuring volume, not weight. If ingredients are measured as instructed previously in this section, your cookies will come out great. Most European cookbooks use the metric system, with measurements in weight. The United Kingdom uses both the imperial system and the metric system. It’s important to note that imperial and US system conversions are different. One quart in the US system equals 16 ounces as opposed to 20 ounces in the imperial system. There is a chart located in the back of the book to help with any necessary conversions (see [here](#)).

Techniques

Here are techniques that apply to baking cookies, including ones that may not be used in other types of cooking. They are simple to remember. Once you master them, there won't be a cookie recipe out there that you'll be afraid to make. Baking Christmas cookies will be a snap.

Mixing

A recipe is made of up various ingredients, and those ingredients typically have to be mixed together. It isn't any different when making cookies. For a successful cookie, you must start with a properly combined dough. That said, I remember reading a cookbook where the chef threw everything into her stand mixer bowl, covered the machine with a kitchen towel, and turned it on high. To this day, I'm still afraid to try that method.

SIFTING

In older recipes, almost all of the dry ingredients were sifted together prior to adding them to the bowl. These days, flours and ingredients such as baking powder are a finer quality and less lumpy, so sifting isn't necessary. To make sure my dry ingredients are well mixed, I use a wire whisk. The only item that still needs to be sifted is confectioners' sugar, which contains lumps. You don't want a lump to stop you from squeezing out icing onto a cookie. To sift confectioners' sugar, measure it out into a wire mesh strainer over a large bowl. Gently shake the strainer and the sugar will fall into the bowl. Eventually all that will be left are the lumps, which can be broken up or thrown away.

CREAMING

Nearly all cookie recipes instruct you to cream your butter and sugar. You need room-temperature butter for this to work. Mix the butter first to make sure it's soft enough before adding the sugar. Next, add the sugar to the bowl. Using an electric mixer, mix until the butter and sugar are well combined. Scrape the sides of the bowl down as you go.

FOLDING

This is a term that is used when stiffly beaten egg whites or whipped cream are added to another mixture prior to baking. To keep the air that is captured (the volume) in the egg whites or whipped cream, the ingredient is stirred in a

spoonful at a time in a figure-eight motion using a spoon or silicone spatula. Once it's folded in, you may still see a bit of the egg whites or cream and that's okay.

JUST COMBINED AND HAND-STIRRED IN

Both of these refer to when ingredients are incorporated but still can be seen in the mixture. This technique is used, for example, when add-ins are mixed into cookie dough just before shaping. Ingredients like dried fruits, chocolate chips, and nuts should be hand-stirred in. You wouldn't want them pulverized by the mixer.

COMPLETELY COMBINED

When ingredients are completely combined, they are mixed so well that they appear as one mass. You won't see a patch of flour or any egg yolks.

Chilling

Unless you have a very cold kitchen, you may want to chill your cookie dough after all of the ingredients are combined prior to baking. Using chilled cookie dough is the key to not having it spread too much during baking. For example, to chill sugar cookie dough, remove it from the bowl and form it into a flat oval. Completely wrap the dough in plastic wrap. Place it on a plate and put it in the refrigerator. I will even put my mixing bowl in the refrigerator in between baking batches of drop cookies.

Rolling and Cutting

To prepare for making sugar cookies, I get out my bread board. It is fine to use your kitchen counter as long as it's cleaned with dish soap, not a harsh spray. Put some flour in a small, shallow bowl and sprinkle a small amount of that flour on your work surface. Use your hand to spread the flour evenly over the surface. Next, dump your cookie dough out on to the board. With floured hands, flatten it out into an oval. Sprinkle a little flour over the oval. After lightly flouring your rolling pin, it's time to roll out the dough. Begin from the middle of the dough and roll outward. Each time the rolling pin is lifted, start back in the middle and roll to the edges. This will keep the edges from getting too thin.

Once the dough is $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick, it's time to cut out the cookies. Dip the cookie cutter into the shallow bowl of flour before pushing it down into the cookie dough. Be sure not to twist or move the cookie cutter around when it's in the dough. Just pull it straight up after cutting. Depending on your dough, you may wish to cut all of the cookies out first and then put them on the prepared baking sheet, or you may transfer them one at a time.

Decorating

Decorating cookies is one of the best activities for all ages. It's perfect as a family effort, and it makes a fun school activity, too. Adults and older children can make the cookie dough and roll it out. Children ages 7 and older can use cookie cutters to cut out the cookies. Adults and older children under adult supervision can bake them. Once the cookies are cooled, everyone can get into the action with decorating.

FROSTING AND ICING

The terms *frosting* and *icing* are used interchangeably. Both are used to describe the actual sugar concoction and how it is applied to cookies, cakes, and more. Some say that *frosting* refers to a thicker mixture and *icing* is thinner and shiny. Buttercream is my favorite frosting. It can be simply made with butter, sugar, and a little milk to thin it out. Flavoring, such as vanilla extract, is also incorporated. Add Dutch cocoa and you have chocolate frosting. Quite often buttercream frosting is made with solid shortening instead of butter. Shortening helps the frosting keep its shape and last longer, but the flavor isn't as good. For intricate cookie decorating, a thin icing, like royal icing, is used. Royal icing is made with water instead of butter.



Her Majesty, Royal Icing

Royal icing is to cookies as fondant is to cakes. They are both excellent to decorate with and are more about looks than about flavor. You can make royal icing with pasteurized egg whites, but I prefer using meringue powder. The consistency of the icing is controlled by how much water is used. To color royal icing, simply add food coloring a few drops at a time until the desired hue is achieved. The same goes for gel food color, only you'll need much less. Keep in mind that once the icing dries, the color will be darker.

4 cups confectioners' sugar

5 tablespoons warm water

3 tablespoons meringue powder (see Resources)

Carefully measure the confectioners' sugar 1 cup at a time by using the teaspoon method (see Dry Ingredients), and sift it using a mesh strainer over a large bowl. Add the warm water and the meringue powder. Using an electric mixer, beat on high speed until stiff peaks form, about 10 minutes. If you have a stand mixer, mix on low speed for the same amount of time. This makes a stiff icing. For a medium-consistency icing, add $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon of warm water for every cup of stiff icing. Fold in the water with a silicone spatula. For flooding, or covering a cookie completely, use a thin icing. To get a thin-consistency icing, add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of warm water for every cup of stiff icing. Don't incorporate it too quickly; instead, use a figure-eight motion to mix in the water.



PIPING

If you want to up your game, you'll want to go beyond spreading the icing with a knife. Instead, use a piping bag and piping tips to decorate your cookies. Piping bags, couplers, and tips can be easily purchased online or in local craft stores. Traditional cloth bags and store-bought plastic icing bags are not strictly necessary; icing can be piped from a resealable plastic bag.

To fill and use a piping bag:

- 1.** Place an icing tip coupler in the corner of the bag. Cut a hole in the corner of the bag just large enough for the end of the coupler to fit through. Place the desired icing tip onto the coupler. Secure the icing tip onto the coupler with the coupler ring.
- 2.** With one hand, grab the middle of the bag with the open end up. Use the other hand to fold the sides down over the hand holding the bag. Next, place the bag, tip down, into a tall glass for stabilization.
- 3.** Use a silicone spatula to transfer icing to the bag. Once the bag is halfway to two-thirds full, unfold the sides and tightly twist the open end several times. Make sure there are no air bubbles in the icing and that it goes down into the tip.
- 4.** You'll need both hands to pipe icing onto your cookies. One hand will twist and push the icing out of the tip and the other hand will be the guide.

PAINTING

Painting cookies is simple and fun to do. All you need is some type of food coloring, food-safe paintbrushes, and something to put the "paints" in. The day before painting, bake and ice your cookies. This allows the icing to set completely. To use gel food coloring to make paints, use ½ teaspoon of gel food coloring for every 1 teaspoon of water. You can also use regular food coloring and mix it with flavor extracts if you choose. Food coloring is added by drops. Begin with 3 or 4 drops and go from there. Once the paint dries, the color will become darker. I have a dozen glass soufflé cups to hold various colors. If desired, add sprinkles and other nonpareils while the paint is still wet.

SPRINKLES AND MORE

Sprinkles, jimmies, colored sugars, sanding sugars, French dragées, Red Hots, and other shapes are known as *nonpareils*. Nonpareils come in endless colors and children of all ages love to decorate with them. Using these are the easiest way to decorate Christmas cookies. Most of the nonpareils can be put on the cookie dough either before baking or after baking when there's wet icing or food paint to hold them on. One of the prettiest ways to use them is after piping or painting a design on a cookie. Take the cookie and dip it upside down into a plate of sprinkles. After a few minutes, it'll be ready to eat.

3 Easy Steps for Flooding

Have you ever seen a cookie that is decorated in such a way that the icing is perfectly even and shiny? It almost seems as if it is floating on top. That icing method is called "flooding." Here is how you do it:

1. With stiff icing (the consistency of toothpaste), pipe an outline of the area to be filled.
2. Pipe thin icing into the outlined area. Depending on the look you desire, it can be the same color as the outline or a different color.
3. Smooth out and remove bubbles from the thin icing either by using a tool, such as a toothpick, or by shaking the cookie back and forth.

Storage and Freezing

The Christmas holidays can be very stressful. To save myself added stress, I like to make several batches of cookie dough ahead of time and freeze it for baking later. How the dough is frozen depends on the type of cookie. For example, I will freeze a drop cookie, such as [Classic Chocolate Chip Cookies](#), as measured balls of dough. I place them on a baking sheet and freeze them overnight. The next day, I transfer them from the baking sheet to resealable plastic bags, which I then

put in a plastic container to go back in the freezer. They can be baked one at a time while still frozen. Dough for [Christmas Sugar Cookies](#) or other roll-out cookie dough can be frozen in batches, then thawed and rolled out later. The cookie dough will maintain its flavor for up to 3 months. With a little advance preparation, I can serve a variety of cookies in under 30 minutes.

Already baked cookies can be frozen, too. Carefully place them in an airtight container with parchment paper between each layer. If they are decorated, they need to be completely dry before freezing. Place each decorated cookie in its own plastic bag. Next, carefully place them in a hard-sided plastic container so they don't get damaged. These need to defrost completely on the kitchen counter while still wrapped.

Frozen frostings and icings will keep their flavor for up to 3 months. Defrost them completely before using them. Both cookie dough and icing can be stored safely in airtight containers or bags in the refrigerator for up to 4 days.

For day-to-day storage, keep soft cookies in airtight containers. Decorated cookies are also stored in airtight containers, but try to avoid stacking them. Crispy cookies should be stored in a loose-lidded container, like a cookie jar.

Building a Cookie Board

A cookie board is one way to display several types of cookies for a party or other event. Before putting cookies on the board, place bowls of dipping chocolate, colorful icing, or even crushed pieces of candy each with a small spoon so guests can top their cookies with goodies. Group the cookies on the board according to size or type. When you have only a few different types to display, divide the batches in half and separate the halves. Got open spaces? Place fancy wrapped candies, candy canes, or other eye-catching edibles in between the cookies. Expecting a larger crowd? Decorate a tabletop or buffet with cookies. Put down a tablecloth first. Use doilies on good china plates. Display cookies on cake stands and other holders with different levels. Place holiday-themed items in between the plates or stands, such as pretty glass ornaments or sprigs of fresh evergreen.

The Christmas Baker's Kitchen

There is nothing more frustrating than to be in a cookie-baking mood only to find that a run to the store is required. Christmastime is busy enough. Alleviate some of the stress by being prepared to bake. One way is to stock your pantry ahead of time. Use the following list to shop for the key ingredients found in most Christmas cookie recipes. Of course, some of the optional items may be needed, as well. Besides these ingredients, it's also important to have the right baking equipment; some tools are absolutely necessary, while others are merely nice to have. Of course, the oven is the most important piece of baking equipment. How well do you know yours?

Staple Ingredients to Stock

If you keep these ingredients on hand, you'll be able to bake cookies anytime you wish.

All-purpose flour: If the recipe says just "flour," this is the flour to use. There are other flours, such as bread, whole-wheat, self-rising, and almond flours. Unless specified in the recipe, these flours may adversely affect the baking results.

Baking soda: Also known as sodium bicarbonate, this leavening agent makes cookies rise. The majority of cookie recipes call for baking soda.

Baking powder: Like baking soda, baking powder makes cookies rise. In fact, most baking powders are made with baking soda, cream of tartar, and cornstarch. Some recipes use baking powder alone, but many use it along with baking soda for an extra leavening boost.

Cream of tartar: This ingredient is found in most vintage cookie recipes. Cream of tartar is used to help activate the rising process in baking soda. It is not usually seen in modern recipes that call for baking powder, which contains both baking soda and cream of tartar. Cream of tartar is sometimes used to stabilize egg whites, especially when making meringues. Several recipes in this book call for this ingredient.

Salt: It's difficult to find many cookie recipes that don't call for salt, which is a flavor enhancer. Cookies made without any salt or salted butter will taste flat. For the recipes in this book, you can use regular table salt.

Butter: All of the recipes in this book call for salted butter. I have at least 4 pounds of butter in my refrigerator at all times. If I have more than 4 pounds of butter on hand, the extra is stored in the freezer. Butter can be frozen for up to 3 months while still maintaining its full flavor.

Vegetable shortening: These days, most people prefer using butter to shortening, but shortening does have its advantages: It has a much longer shelf life than butter. Cookie doughs made with shortening are sturdier and will hold their shape longer. Vegetable shortening is also less expensive.

Vegetable oil: This type of oil is occasionally used in making cookies. While olive oil may be substituted, its specific flavor may not work for the cookies you're making. Flavorless refined coconut oil is another option, but it is difficult to work with as it's a cross between an oil and a solid shortening and needs to be melted before using.

Eggs: Large is the standard egg size. Very few cookies are made without eggs. Eggs not only help bind the ingredients, but they also add volume if well beaten.

Sugar: The most common form of sugar used in making Christmas cookies is granulated sugar. When you see "sugar" in the ingredient list for a recipe in this book, use granulated sugar.

Light brown sugar: A larger-grained sugar mixed with molasses, light brown sugar is used in many drop-cookie recipes. Dark brown sugar has more molasses in it and may affect the cookie flavor.

Confectioners' sugar: Also known as powdered sugar, icing sugar, or XXX/10X sugar, confectioners' sugar is another must-stock ingredient that typically is used by itself on the surface of the cookie or is a component of the frosting. It is a sugar that is ground very fine (10X is the finest grind and 3X the least fine) and is powdery in texture. Confectioners' sugar always has cornstarch in it to make it even lighter. If you prefer not to use confectioners' sugar made with cornstarch, you may grind your own granulated sugar in the food processor.

Unsweetened cocoa powder: Dutch-process cocoa powder is darker and less acidic than natural unsweetened cocoa powder—the latter is typically what I have on hand. I’ve never noticed any more acidity, because my recipes typically already include baking soda and/or baking powder, which naturally neutralizes acidity.

Vanilla extract: Especially in the United States, vanilla extract is found in most baked goods. The more expensive the vanilla, the more robust the flavor.

Spices: The most common spices used in Christmas cookies are cinnamon and nutmeg. I also always keep ground ginger, cardamom, and cloves in my pantry.

Food coloring: If colored icing is used frequently, then icing gels are most desired as they offer more vibrant colors. Icing gels need a more practiced hand as they can be very tricky to work with. Also, too much gel will impart a bitter flavor. Standard food coloring from the grocery store works fine for occasional use. It’s hard to go wrong with food coloring.

The Better Butter

There are so many butters on the market, but which one makes the best cookie? My rule of thumb is to save the very best butters for spreading on bread. I use moderately priced butter for cookie doughs, and I don’t use inexpensive butter at all for baking. I admit that the only time I will not follow a cookie recipe exactly is when it calls for unsalted butter. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve taken a bite out of a perfectly beautiful cookie only to be underwhelmed by the flavor. The reason is that the baker used unsalted butter. Some say unsalted butter is fresher, but I get better results with salted butter, which is what all the recipes in this book call for. I keep it on hand specifically for baking. If you prefer to use unsalted butter or it’s all you have, simply add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of salt per each 8 tablespoons of butter in the recipe, but the flavors will meld better when you use salted butter.

Optional Ingredients to Stock

You may also want to include the following special ingredients in your pantry:

- Semisweet chocolate chips and other forms of chocolate
- Candy-coated chocolates and other candies
- Sanding and sparkling decorative sugars, such as colored sugars
- Nonpareils, such as sprinkles, themed sprinkles, chocolate jimmies, French dragées, Red Hots, and sugar pearls
- Additional extract flavors, such as almond, orange, lemon, cinnamon, anise, and rum
- Other spices, such as ground cloves, allspice, ginger, cardamom, anise, and mace
- Nuts, such as pecans, walnuts, or almonds—nuts can last for months in the freezer

Tools and Equipment

To make the baking process easier, you need to get acquainted with some specific kitchen tools.

MUST-HAVE

Here are the kitchen tools that are essential for making the Christmas cookies in this book.

Electric mixer: Cookie dough can be mixed by hand with a wooden spoon—but it will take a lot of strength, especially for a heavy cookie, like a drop cookie. Electric mixers come in a large price range. Buy what you can afford, but if there is a choice, choose one with the strongest motor.

Baking sheets: You'll need two of these. They come in all sizes and materials. I prefer the 13-by-18-inch shiny metal pans with 1¼-inch sides. They are also known as “half sheet pans.” The shiny metal ensures even baking. The sides

allow for the pan to be used for other things, like bar cookies and roll cakes. Two are needed to either bake at the same time or rotate with another batch.

Cooling racks: Two of these are ideal. Most cookies need to cool a bit first on the baking sheet while sitting on a cooling rack. Then the cookies need to be transferred from the pan to the rack for complete cooling.

Mixing bowls: You'll need at least two or three of these, including one large bowl. Ceramic and glass mixing bowls are popular, but I prefer my stainless steel bowls because they are lightweight and unbreakable.

Wet and dry measuring cups and spoons: Wet measuring cups come in various sizes, from 1 cup to 2 quarts. The 2-cup measuring cup and the 4-cup (1-quart) glass ones get the most use in my kitchen. A full set each of dry measuring cups and measuring spoons is necessary. Dry measuring cups come in 1-cup, $\frac{3}{4}$ -cup, $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup, and $\frac{1}{4}$ -cup sizes. Measuring spoons are usually attached; a basic set comes in 1-tablespoon, 1-teaspoon, $\frac{1}{2}$ -teaspoon and $\frac{1}{4}$ -teaspoon sizes.

Wire mesh strainer: In these recipes, a wire mesh strainer is used exclusively to sift confectioners' sugar.

Wire whisk: This tool is used to thoroughly mix dry ingredients.

Silicone spatula: This is good for scraping down the sides of a bowl and for spreading things like melted chocolate.

Metal spatula: Use a metal spatula to remove cookies from the baking sheets.

Cooking spray, parchment paper, or silicone baking mat: Any one of these will work to keep your cookies from sticking to the baking sheets. I vary which one I use depending on the cookie I'm baking.

Rolling pin: A regular wooden rolling pin with two handles works just fine, but there are other types available, as well. I own several rolling pins. The one I got from my grandmother is a hollow ceramic type with a cork in each end. You fill the inside with cold water. It works best for pie pastries. My wooden French rolling pin has tapered ends, which makes it easier to roll dough flat-handed. I also have a stainless steel rolling pin similar to the French one. The metal stays

cooler while rolling. Which one do I use the most? A regular wooden rolling pin with two handles.

Cookie cutters: A huge set of cookie cutters isn't necessary; just choose the shapes you prefer. They come in almost every shape you can imagine. There are even companies that will make one just for you. I prefer metal cookie cutters, but plastic ones work, too.

Give Your Oven Some Lovin'

The oven is the most important piece of equipment for any cookie baker. How well do you know your oven? Do you have a convection oven setting? If so, you can bake at 25°F lower than a recipe specifies, and your cookies will finish 25 percent faster. Are your cookies getting burnt? Check the temperature calibration with an oven thermometer. Is one side of the pan cooking faster than the other? Make sure it isn't touching another baking sheet or the walls or door of the oven. Are you using dark cookie pans? If so, lower the oven temperature by 25°F from what the recipe instructs. This may also lengthen the baking time. Baking at a high altitude makes a big difference in cakes but not as much in cookies. Be sure to set a timer, but always use your nose as a backup. When I begin to smell the cookies, they usually are done or are very close to being done, no matter the time.

NICE TO HAVE

This baking equipment isn't totally necessary for making cookies. It will just make the process even simpler.

Stand mixer: I can't lie; this is my favorite cookie-making tool. Making cookie dough is a breeze with a stand mixer. You practically just throw the ingredients into the bowl and you're done before you know it. My daughter is using Ole' Bluey, the first stand mixer I had for 25 years, and I've been using Big Red, a bigger, more powerful one for the last 3 years.

Wooden bread board: I use my bread board for rolling out and cutting cookie dough. A large baking mat or a very clean kitchen countertop will work as well.

Food scale: A digital scale isn't necessary for making cookies as long as measuring cups are used correctly. But it can be a helpful tool if you want to use recipes from other countries (make sure it measures in both ounces and grams).

Professional cloth piping bags and metal piping tips: Professional piping bags and tips elevate fancy decorated sugar cookies. You can still decorate cookies by using disposable plastic bags with a small hole in the corner and a tip pushed through. Lower-priced plastic tips can be found in the grocery store baking aisle along with already-made decorators' icing. If nicer cloth bags and metal tips are preferred, most craft stores have them. Be sure to also check out yard sales and your local thrift stores.

Cookie press: Buttery cookie dough is pushed through a cookie press to form various shapes, like Christmas trees, holiday wreaths, and more.

Cookie scoops: These ensure that all of the cookies are the same size. Measuring spoons can perform the same job, just not as easily. I have a two-ended cookie scoop. One end holds 1 tablespoon of dough and the other end holds 2 tablespoons. I have to use a miniature silicone spatula to get the dough out of the scoop. There are cookie scoops that work like some ice cream scoops: You scoop up the dough and then compress the handles to flip the dough out.

Best Gift Ever

Homemade gifts are the best gifts, especially when they are edible. When deciding on edible gifts and their packaging, I'm reminded of the riddle, "Which came first: the chicken or the egg?" Sometimes, I find containers first and then I decide what to put in them. This happens when I purchase the next year's containers at after-Christmas sales. Other times, I decide on the baked goods and then have to find a container. Containers can be as simple as clear cellophane plastic bags, which can be easily found at your local craft store or online, tied with a pretty bow, or something as extravagant as a vintage cookie jar found at an antique shop.

When I am giving similar edible gifts to several people at the same time, I like to use wide-mouth canning jars. To decorate each jar, I top the lid with a square piece of Christmas fabric cut with pinking shears and attach the fabric with a rubber band. I punch a hole in a business card–size gift card I’ve signed and printed with, for example, “Nutty Chocolate Clusters—Made Just for You.” Last, I thread the card onto a piece of coordinating ribbon and tie it around the jar, totally covering the rubber band.

About the Recipes

The recipes in this cookbook are divided into four chapters. The first recipe chapter is filled with holiday favorites. These cookies are the ones you may make or at least eat every Christmas baking season. The next chapter also features classics, but with a twist. [Chapter 4](#) offers a few new creations that may turn into classics. The final chapter is filled with Christmas treats that aren’t technically cookies, but they are featured at many cookie swaps and on cookie boards and buffets everywhere.

Be sure and look for what Louisianans call *lagniappes* (“LAN-yaps”) included with each recipe. These “small gifts” come in the form of useful labels and special tips that will help ensure your cookie-baking success.

The labels you’ll find throughout this book include the following:

Bar cookies: These are cookies that are baked in a rectangular or square pan and are cut into squares for serving. Some bar cookies are layered and baked a couple of times. Others are made with a single drop-cookie dough.

Contains nuts: These recipes contain nuts, such as pecans, walnuts, almonds, cashews, peanuts, and more.

Drop cookies: These are the most common type of cookies. They come in a plethora of flavors and are easily adapted to Christmas recipes.

Freezer-friendly: The texture and flavor of the baked cookie should last up to 3 months in the freezer if frozen according to the recipe instructions. Some cookie doughs can be also frozen up to 3 months.

Icebox cookies: Before the cookie dough is put into the refrigerator to chill, it is formed into a long roll. Once it is completely cold, the dough is sliced and then baked.

Molded cookies: The cookie dough is molded by hand into various shapes.

Rolled cookies: Sugar cookies are an excellent example of rolled cookies. The dough is rolled out with a rolling pin and then cut into shapes, usually with cookie cutters.

The tips you'll find throughout this book include the following:

Ingredient tip: This highlights a certain ingredient, including its unique properties or specific handling.

Serving tip: This shares ideas for how the cookies may best be displayed or served to highlight their unique features.

Storage tip: Here's where you'll find special storage instructions beyond the ones already included in the recipes, such as for freezing.

Technique tip: Other cooking and/or prepping tips will be explained here.

Traditions: This will highlight the origin of the recipe or draw attention to those with an international flavor.

Troubleshooting tip: If there is a common issue with the recipe, this explains what to look out for and how to fix it.

Variation: This will offer suggestions of other ingredients that may be used instead of the ones listed.

Host a Cookie Swap

Before your holiday calendar gets too full, be sure to choose a date to host a cookie swap. A cookie swap is one of the easiest parties to host. All you need to provide is a clean home, a big table to display the cookies, beverages, plates, napkins, and six dozen cookies for the exchange. Perhaps a couple of prizes for the contest winners, if you have a contest. A couple of weeks before the event, mail, e-mail, or message your invitations. Be sure to include all of the party details, such as in this sample invitation:

YOU'RE INVITED TO A Christmas Holiday Cookie Swap

WHEN: Saturday, December 5, at 2:00pm

WHERE: My home

COME: Dressed in your finest holiday wear

BRING: Six dozen of your decoratively displayed, tastiest homemade Christmas cookies for sharing

OPTIONAL: Bring an additional container to carry your new cookies home

INCLUDED: Hot teas, coffees, wine, and sparkling water

YOU COULD BE A WINNER IN ONE OF THESE CONTESTS:
Best-Tasting Cookies, Prettiest Cookies, and Loveliest Cookie Display

PLEASE RSVP BY
Monday, November 30



CHAPTER TWO

Holiday Favorites

Everyone has a favorite holiday cookie. Mine changes from year to year. This Christmas I plan to make—and eat—lots of the tricolored [Neapolitan Cookies](#). I really enjoy that strawberry, chocolate, and almond flavor combination. Also, the adult in me craves something that will play a little with my taste buds, like [St. Nicholas Cookies \(*Speculaas*\)](#), which are loaded with cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. But at Christmas, the person I really need to make happy is the little girl inside me. She says it's either [Gingerbread People](#) or [Christmas Sugar Cookies](#). What's your favorite? I bet you'll find it in this chapter.

[Holiday Pinwheel Cookies](#)

[Butter Spritz Cookies](#)

[Christmas Sugar Cookies](#)

[Aunt Wanda's Ginger Cookies](#)

[Gingerbread People](#)

[Neapolitan Cookies](#)

[St. Nicholas Cookies \(*Speculaas*\)](#)

[Orange-Walnut Biscotti](#)

[Linzer Cookies](#)

[Holiday Shortbread Biscuits](#)

[Polish-Style Christmas Cookies \(*Kolaczki*\)](#)

[Snowballs](#)

Sprinkle Cookies

Chocolate-Dipped Almond Cookies (*Amygdalota*)

Chocolate-Dipped Macaroons

Chinese-Style Almond Cookies

Classic Chocolate Chip Cookies

Peanut Butter Blossoms

Chocolate Crinkles



Holiday Pinwheel Cookies

Makes 28 cookies

PREP TIME: 45 minutes, plus 3 hours 20 minutes to chill | **COOK TIME:**
10 minutes

Freezer-Friendly, Icebox Cookies

You'll see many holiday pinwheel cookies out there. Two of the other popular pinwheel Christmas color schemes are red and white, and red and green. I like doing the green and white ones so that using the red sprinkles on the side stand out. Don't let the 3 hours of chilling put you off. It's very important to bake these cookies while the dough is still cold. If the dough is too warm, the rings won't bake as desired. They may run into each other, destroying the pinwheel shape you went to so much trouble to make.

2 cups flour, divided

½ teaspoon baking powder

¼ teaspoon salt

12 tablespoons salted butter, at room temperature

¾ cup sugar

1 large egg

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon green food coloring

Red sprinkles

- 1.** In a medium bowl, using a wire whisk, combine 2 cups of flour, the baking powder, and salt. Set aside. In a large bowl, cream the butter

and sugar together. Mix in the egg and vanilla. Add the flour mixture, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup at a time, until the mixture is well combined.

2. Divide the dough in half. Place one half on a 15-inch-long piece of parchment or wax paper. Top it with another piece of parchment or wax paper. Roll the dough between the paper pieces until it's an 8-by-12-inch rectangle. Transfer the papered dough to a baking sheet and place it in the refrigerator.
3. Add the green food coloring to the other half of the cookie dough in the bowl. Use an electric mixer to blend in the coloring. If a darker color is desired, feel free to add a little more food coloring. Mix the dough until it is completely colored.
4. As with the first piece of dough, place the green dough in between two pieces of 15-inch-long parchment or wax paper. Roll out the dough into an 8-by-12-inch rectangle. Place it on top of the other piece of dough in the refrigerator. Chill for at least 20 minutes.
5. Remove both pieces of dough from the refrigerator. Place the noncolored dough on clean work surface. Remove the top piece of paper, being careful not to tear the dough. Remove the bottom piece of paper from the green-colored dough. Very carefully place the green dough on top of the noncolored dough by starting at an edge and gently laying the green dough down. Remove the paper from the top of the green dough. Use a knife to cut off the uneven edges.
6. Starting at one of the long sides, begin rolling up the layered doughs into a log while gently pulling the dough away from the bottom piece of paper. Once rolled, pinch the long edge to seal. Wrap the rolled dough in a piece of plastic wrap and place it back on the baking sheet and into the refrigerator. Chill for 1 hour.
7. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Set aside.
8. With flat hands, gently roll the dough back and forth to get rid of any flattened surface created by sitting on the baking sheet. Chill for another hour.
9. Fill a tray with red sprinkles. Remove the dough from the plastic wrap and place it on the tray. Gently roll the dough back and forth to

completely cover it with sprinkles. If needed, add sprinkles by hand to areas that didn't get covered. Rewrap the dough and place back in the refrigerator for another hour.

- 10.** Slice off the uneven ends of the dough log. Cut the log into ¼-inch slices and place half of them 1½ inches apart on one of the prepared baking sheets. Bake for 10 minutes, until lightly browned.
- 11.** While the first batch is baking, place the rest of the slices on the other prepared baking sheet. Place in the refrigerator until it's time to bake them.
- 12.** Cool baked cookies for 2 minutes on the baking sheet, then transfer the cookies to a cooling rack to cool completely. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 1 week.

STORAGE TIP: The plastic-wrapped rolled dough without the sprinkles will keep for up to 3 months in the freezer stored in an airtight container. Defrost in the refrigerator.

VARIATION: Make any color combination you desire. You could even divide the dough into 3 or 4 portions for more colors. Feel free to use different extracts to change the flavor.

For more recipes, please
unlock the full version.