

Cookie Basics

General Preparation Guidelines

1. About 15 minutes before baking your first batch, preheat your oven to the temperature in the recipe. If using a convection oven, reduce the baking temperature by 25 degrees, and check for doneness a bit earlier than the recipe calls for.

2. When measuring all-purpose flour and any other dry ingredient, scoop the ingredient from its container into the measuring cup or spoon, and scrape off the excess with a straight edge. This will ensure accuracy in your measurements.

3. Sift or whisk the dry ingredients as directed. This technique aerates the flour and distributes the leavening and spices evenly throughout, making the finished cookie more uniform in texture.

4. Most butter and eggs should be at room temperature (about 65 degrees) before beating. Room-temperature butter is pliable but not soft or melted.

5. Dry ingredients are added to the butter mixture just until all traces of the flour disappear. Overmixing develops the gluten in the dough and results in a tough cookie.

6. If instructions call for chilling, chill for the minimum amount of time. Chilling relaxes the gluten and helps flavors become more developed and integrated into the dough. Cookies become more tender and flavorful. Chilling also helps them spread less during baking. If chilled dough is too stiff to scoop or roll, let it soften a few minutes at room temperature.

7. Parchment paper is recommended as a liner for cookie sheets. Cookies will not stick to it, making cleanup easier. Parchment also has an insulating effect, which promotes even baking.

8. Cookies bake more evenly if they are all the same size. I recommend using a cookie scoop to form equal-size dough balls. You can also use a scale to measure equal-size portions.

9. Cool cookies thoroughly before storing in an airtight container. Cookies that are not completely cooled before storing can become soggy

and lose their shape from trapped steam. Store each cookie variety in its own sealed container, so that flavors and aromas don't mingle.

Freezing and Storage Tips

Freezing cookie dough or baked cookies is a great way to manage your time and serve just the quantity you need.

Freezing dough: Most stiff cookie doughs can be frozen. Liquid batters or meringue dough cannot be frozen.

To freeze drop cookies, scoop uniform balls onto a cookie sheet, spacing them 1 inch apart, and freeze them until solid. Put the frozen balls into a freezer storage bag, and store up to 1 month in the freezer. When you are ready to bake, place frozen cookie balls on a prepared cookie sheet, spacing as directed in the recipe, and defrost completely before baking. You can also freeze the entire batch of dough in a sealed plastic container and defrost it in the refrigerator for several hours or overnight, then use as directed.

For slice-and-bake cookie logs, shape and wrap logs in wax paper or plastic wrap, then wrap in foil and place in a freezer storage bag. To defrost, cut the frozen dough into individual slices and defrost, or defrost the entire log, in the refrigerator for several hours or overnight, and use as directed.

Freezing cookies: Be sure the cookies are completely cooled before freezing. Freeze them, layered between wax or parchment paper, in a freezer storage bag. For extra protection, wrap the cookie layers in plastic wrap before putting them into the freezer bag. If the cookies are fragile, place the filled freezer storage bag on a cookie sheet or in a plastic container, to protect the edges of the cookies. Cookies can be stored for up to 1 month in the freezer. To defrost, place cookies in a single layer on a flat surface, and leave at room temperature for about 1 hour.

For bar cookies, cut the pan of cookies into individual cookies and wrap each cookie in plastic wrap. Place the wrapped cookies in a freezer storage bag, and freeze. Alternatively, wrap the entire pan of uncut cookies in plastic wrap or foil, place it in a freezer storage bag, and freeze. Bar cookies can be stored in the freezer for 4 to 6 weeks. To defrost individual bar cookies, place unwrapped cookies in a single layer on a flat surface, and leave at room temperature for about 1 hour. For a pan of uncut cookies, defrost at room temperature for 2 to 3 hours.

Chocolate, Spice, and Everything Nice

Chocolate has a timeless appeal to both simple and sophisticated palates. These chocolate cookies bring new flavor combinations front and center. In this chapter, find something innovative, dazzling, and unexpected to add to your cookie repertoire.





Chocolate Mexican Spice Cookies

Makes 30 to 36 cookies

I am often inspired by flavors in candy bars. One of my favorite chocolate combinations is found in Lindt's chocolate, chili, and cherry bar. These soft, chewy cookies mix cinnamon and cayenne with dark, rich chocolate and tart cherries. To make them extra-dark, substitute 1 tbsp. black cocoa for 1 tbsp. Dutch-process cocoa.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

In a medium bowl, sift together flour, cocoa, baking soda, salt, and spices. Set aside.

In the large bowl of an electric mixer, with speed set to high, cream the butter

and sugars 2 to 3 minutes, until fluffy. Add egg and vanilla extract. Beat until well combined.

Set mixer to low. Add the flour mixture, and mix until just combined. Fold in chocolate chips and cherries.

Using a medium cookie scoop (#40), drop rounded tablespoons of dough onto prepared cookie sheets, spacing about 2 inches apart. Bake 12 to 14 minutes, until puffed and cracked. Cool on cookie sheets for 2 minutes.

Transfer cookies, still on parchment, to wire racks to cool completely.

Store in an airtight container, at room temperature, for up to 3 days.

INGREDIENTS

¾ cup plus 2 tbsp. all-purpose flour
½ cup plus 2 tbsp. unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa
1 tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. sea salt
½ tsp. cinnamon
¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
½ tsp. ground black pepper
10 tbsp. (1¼ sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
½ cup plus 2 tbsp. granulated sugar
¼ cup plus 2 tbsp. packed dark brown sugar
1 large egg, room temperature
½ tsp. pure vanilla extract
6 oz. (about 1 cup) bittersweet or semisweet chocolate chips
¾ cup dried sour cherries, coarsely chopped

Baker's Note: If you prefer the cookie less spicy, reduce the cayenne pepper to ⅛ tsp.



Chocolate-Ginger Fudge Shortbread Cookies

Makes 60 to 72 cookies

Chocolate-ginger fudge is layered over a thin buttery shortbread cookie. For the best results, use Lyle's Golden Syrup or another cane-sugar syrup in the topping. Cut the cookies into 1-inch squares, because a small piece will easily satisfy a sweet tooth.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line the sides and bottom of an 8x8-inch baking pan with foil, leaving an overhang of about 2 inches on each of 2 opposite sides. Cut parchment paper to fit bottom of pan, and place on foil. Lightly butter bottom and sides. Set aside.

In a medium bowl, sift together flour, cornstarch, and salt. Whisk in brown sugar. With a pastry cutter, cut in butter until dough resembles coarse meal. Add water and egg yolk. With a fork, blend until combined.

Spread the dough in a thin, even layer across the bottom of the pan. Smooth top. Bake 15 to 20 minutes, until golden. Pierce crust if it bubbles.

About 2 to 3 minutes before shortbread is done, prepare topping. Melt butter in a small saucepan, and stir in chocolate, golden syrup, powdered sugar, ground ginger, and vanilla until smooth. Fold in crystallized ginger.

Remove shortbread from oven. While shortbread is still warm, spread topping over crust. Smooth top.

Cool completely in the pan. Then, using foil overhang as an aid, lift uncut cookies out of pan, and cut into 1-inch squares.

Store in an airtight container, at room temperature, for up to 5 days.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup all-purpose flour
2 tsp. cornstarch
¼ tsp. salt
¼ cup packed light brown sugar
8 tbsp. (1 stick) chilled unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes
1 tbsp. water
1 large egg yolk, room temperature

Topping

8 tbsp. (1 stick) unsalted butter
6 oz. bittersweet or semisweet chocolate
2 tbsp. Lyle's Golden Syrup (or substitute light corn syrup)
2 cups powdered sugar
1 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
¼ cup chopped crystallized ginger

Baker's Note: For an extra kick, sprinkle 2 tbsp. chopped crystallized ginger onto the warm topping, and press lightly so the pieces adhere.



Chocolate Malt Sandwich Cookies

Makes 54 to 60 unfilled cookies or 27 to 30 sandwich cookies

These dense chocolate malt cookies are perfectly paired with this tangy, crème fraiche and white chocolate ganache filling. They are reminiscent of a chocolate malt with vanilla ice cream. They can also be enjoyed unfilled or served as an accompaniment to a bowl of vanilla ice cream.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.

In a separate medium bowl, sift together the cocoa and malted-milk powder.

In the large bowl of an electric mixer, with speed set to high, beat eggs about 4 to 5 minutes, until doubled in volume. Add heavy cream and crème fraiche. Beat until thoroughly combined.

Add vanilla and powdered sugar. Beat until thoroughly combined. Add melted chocolate. Beat until combined.

Add cocoa-malted-milk mixture, in 3 or 4 portions, and mix until thoroughly combined. Set mixer speed to low. Mix in flour mixture until combined.

Add chopped semisweet and white chocolate. Mix until combined. Dough

will have the consistency of thick frosting.

Using a small cookie scoop (#100), shape dough into ¾-inch balls and drop onto prepared cookie sheets, spacing them about 2 inches apart. Bake 10 to 12 minutes, until firm to the touch. Transfer cookies, still on parchment, to wire racks to cool completely.

To prepare filling, put white chocolate in a small mixing bowl. Set aside.

Put heavy cream in a small saucepan and bring to a boil. Add vanilla and crème fraiche. Stir about 15 seconds, until combined and heated through.

Pour hot cream mixture over chocolate, and stir until smooth. Chill in refrigerator for 30 minutes to 1 hour, stirring occasionally, until mixture becomes thick enough to spread.

When ready to serve, spread ¾ tsp. filling onto the bottom side of a cookie. Place a second cookie, flat side down, on top of the filling, and gently press cookies together. Repeat with remaining cookies.

Store unfilled cookies in an airtight container, at room temperature, for up to 3 days.

INGREDIENTS

6 tbsp. all-purpose flour
¼ tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. salt
¼ cup Dutch-process cocoa
½ cup malted-milk powder
2 large eggs, room temperature
2 tbsp. heavy cream
2 tbsp. crème fraiche
2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1 cup powdered sugar
2 oz. unsweetened chocolate, melted and cooled
2 oz. semisweet chocolate, chopped
2 oz. white chocolate, chopped

Filling

5 oz. white chocolate, finely chopped
3 tbsp. heavy cream
½ tsp. pure vanilla extract
3 tbsp. crème fraiche



Lemony White Chocolate and Pink Peppercorn Delights

Makes 30 to 36 cookies

Brown sugar and butter caramelize to make these buttery, white chocolate chip cookies crispy on the edges and chewy on the insides. The lemon complements the mild, pink peppercorn spice, leaving a warm mouth feeling. Chill the dough overnight to allow the flavor to fully develop. These are my new favorite.

In a medium bowl, sift together flour, salt, and baking soda. Set aside.

In the large bowl of an electric mixer, with speed set to high, cream butter about 1 minute, until fluffy. Add sugars and egg. Beat about 3 minutes, until light and fluffy.

Add lemon juice, lemon zest, peppercorns, and vanilla. Beat until

combined. Reduce speed to low. Add flour mixture, and mix until just combined. Add white chocolate chips, and mix until combined.

Refrigerate overnight for flavors to fully develop.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

Using a medium cookie scoop (#40), drop rounded tablespoons of dough onto prepared cookie sheets, spacing them about 2½ inches apart. Bake 12 to 15 minutes, until centers are golden brown and edges are a shade darker. Transfer cookies, still on parchment, to wire racks to cool completely.

Store in an airtight container, at room temperature, for up to 1 week.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup all-purpose flour
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. baking soda
8 tbsp. (1 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature
½ cup packed light brown sugar
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 large egg, room temperature
1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. grated lemon zest, packed
1 tsp. pink peppercorns, crushed
½ tsp. pure vanilla extract
2 cups white chocolate chips

Baker's Note: If you prefer a crispier cookie, bake until tops are a deep golden brown, 15 to 16 minutes.