

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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In some homes it just is not Christmas without a pile of cookies on the table.

Some families just want one kind, others need a variety, all colors, all shapes, all flavors to choose from. And there are some people who bake for their friends, give to the mailman, the garbage men, the car repair men, and not keep a single one for themselves. Whichever category you're in, Happy Holidays!

If you're new to the cookie making business, or just want to try a couple new varieties, here are some hints to make the experience more fun and the results more satisfying.

Probably one of the most overlooked factors in successful cookie baking is temperature, not just of the oven but of the ingredients. With butter or margarine that must be creamed or beaten, if it is too soft it won't hold the air bubbles and the dough won't rise. If it too hard you won't get enough air beaten into the dough. "Softened" butter should be soft enough that you can leave an imprint of your finger with some pressure. If it is so soft it's practically melting, or so hard you can barely make a dent, the cookies won't be nearly as nice.

Most cookie dough benefits from being chilled after it's mixed. Drop cookies from chilled dough will rise more and spread out less. Dough for cut-out cookies is much easier to roll out, and will stay more tender if it is chilled first, and kept chilled. Just roll out a small portion of the dough at one time. Cut the cookies you can, and put the

scraps back in the refrigerator in a separate bowl. Roll and cut the rest of the dough, adding scraps to the same bowl. When the first round of cutting is done gently knead the scraps together. Too much kneading and squeezing and rolling will make the cookies tough instead of tender.

When mixing doughs and batters, do add the dry flour alternately with the liquids if that's what the directions call for. If you dump all the flour in at once, even though it looks evenly mixed the flour will not have had enough time to soak up moisture or fat the way it should. By adding a little flour and mixing, then a little liquid and mixing, you allow the flour to become evenly hydrated. The finished baked product will be more moist and more even the whole way through. There won't be dense dry areas, and it won't taste 'starchy'.

If you're making bar cookies, prepare the pans for easier cutting. Cut a piece of aluminum foil that is at least 6 inches longer than the length of the pan you're using. Fold the sides under so that it is just as wide as the pan. Lay it in the pan with the ends hanging over the ends of the pan. Grease it as you grease the pan if the recipe calls for that. Add the dough and bake the cookies. After they're cool use the ends of the foil as handles to lift the whole big bar out of the pan. Now you can easily cut from side to side and get nice even pieces without losing the corners and edges.

So, are you ready to make cookies? Here's an easy recipe that you can ask the children or grandchildren to help you make. After the dough is chilled and rolled into little balls they can use a glass to press the balls flat and stick an almond in the center of each one. If you want some extra color, divide the dough in half before you chill it and knead enough food coloring into it to give it the color you prefer.

Squashed Almond Cookies

1 cup regular margarine or butter	1 cup sugar
1 egg	1 tsp almond extract
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour	1 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp salt	1 Tbsp water

whole blanched almonds

Let margarine sit at room temperature until it's just getting soft. Cream it in large mixing bowl until fluffy. Gradually add sugar while beating until light and fluffy. Add egg, beat well. Stir in almond extract. Stir together in small bowl the flour, baking powder and salt. Add half to butter mixture, mix well, add water, mix well, add rest of flour. When well mixed put dough in large zipper-seal plastic bag and refrigerate at least 2 hours.

Preheat oven to 350° F. Shape dough into small balls about 1 inch across. Put on ungreased baking sheet, 2 inches apart. Press with the bottom of a glass until 1/4 inch thick. Press an almond into the center of each cookie. Bake 12 to 15 minutes.

Transfer to wire rack or sheet of foil to cool. Makes about 4 dozen.

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