

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### The Holidays are Around the Corner

Calls are all ready coming to my office about starting the holiday baking! Are you the advance baker in your family? It is certainly not too early to begin planning your baking. If you have the freezer space you can heat up the oven. But before you touch the temperature button, think first about what you want to make and how to keep all the goodies at top quality for giving or enjoying.

One option for advance preparation is to make the cookie dough and freeze it now. Bake it a little at a time just before Christmas. Your house will smell wonderful, the cookies will be fresh, but you won't have to do the cleanup. Or you can bake and freeze them now. It's less work then, but also less aroma.

Whether you decide to freeze dough or bake cookies now, before you start, take a look at the freezer. How much space do you have? How much could you use to make more space? Don't bake more than you have space for. If you have an old deep freeze, you're actually better off! Frequently opening the door and automatic defrosting both allow more freezer burn. They let the freezer warm up just slightly each time. The more often it warms a little and cools a little, the more frost burn there will be.

Frozen dough will keep 6 to 9 months. Log cookies are like the logs of premade dough in the store that you slice before baking. This dough can be mixed, rolled into logs, wrapped in plastic or foil and frozen. To use just thaw enough to cut the slices, lay them on the baking sheet and bake. Drop cookie dough can be packed in plastic freezer containers and frozen, or dropped onto a cookie sheet and frozen. The frozen drops can be stored in bags or containers until ready to bake, then laid out on the baking sheet again, thawed slightly and baked. A container of dough will need to be thawed overnight in the refrigerator, then dropped by spoonfuls on the sheet and baked. Brownie and bar cookie dough can be spread in foil baking pans lined with parchment paper and frozen. Thaw in the refrigerator, then bake right in the same pan.

If you bake now make adjustments to limit damage caused by freezer burn no matter what kind of freezer you have. Write down a list of what kinds of cookies you'd like to make. Then, rearrange the list so that the driest, crispest cookies are first on the list. Put meringues and macarons at the

very end of the list. Put filled cookies such as thumb prints towards the end of the list. Put the rest in the middle of your list. This is the order you want to bake.

With the least amount of moisture, crisp cookies won't suffer as much from freezer burn. Make those first. But meringues, macaroons and others made with beaten egg whites will get tough and lose their wonderful delicate crispness in the freezer. If possible, these should not be frozen at all. Who wants a gummy meringue?

Filled cookies and thumb prints will get soggy if you put the jam or filling in them. But you can bake and freeze them without the filling, then add it just before giving them away. Frosted cookies are also best baked and frozen plain then decorated just before giving. That way none of your careful frosting work will be damaged.

Imitation vanilla tends to get bitter when it's frozen. So, if you start your baking now use real vanilla. Yes, it costs a bit more, but the flavor will be much better. Use imitation vanilla for the last minute batches if you want.

Once baked, let the cookies cool quickly. You want to package them with as little air as possible to preserve the flavors and limit the freezer burn. Use freezer-weight sealable plastic bags or wrap. Stack or lay them in the bags in ways that protect their shape, then squeeze or suck as much air out as possible and seal the bag. Now lay the bags in a rigid plastic or cardboard box to keep them from being crushed. Be sure to add the name and date to the containers.

Sit back, take a deep breath, and relax knowing that your holiday baking is almost done! Here's a three-option recipe to get you started. If you want, add several drops of a different food coloring to each dough for more variety.

#### Three in One Cookies

1 cup butter or margarine, slightly softened	½ cup sugar
½ cup brown sugar, firmly packed	1 egg
½ tsp vanilla extract	2 cups all purpose flour
½ tsp baking soda	¼ tsp salt
½ cup each flaked coconut, chopped pecans and raisins	

Beat butter in mixing bowl until creamy. Keep beating and gradually add sugars until it's fluffy. Add egg and vanilla, beat until smooth. Add flour, soda and salt and beat until well mixed. Divide dough into 3 bowls. Mix coconut into one, pecans into one and raisins into one. Put each lump of dough onto large sheet of plastic wrap, form into logs about 1 inch across, wrap tightly and chill or freeze. To bake, cut into thin slices and place 2 inches apart on greased baking sheet. Bake at 375° F for 8 min until lightly browned. Makes about 2 dozen of each kind.

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