

— AMERICA'S —
TEST KITCHEN

Easy Holiday Sugar Cookies

SERVES Makes about forty 2 1/2-inch cookies

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS

Our holiday roll-and-cut sugar cookies taste as great as they are easy to make. For a crisp and sturdy texture with no hint of graininess, we made superfine sugar by grinding granulated sugar briefly in the food processor, and we added small amounts of baking powder and baking soda to the dough. We skipped creaming softened butter and sugar in favor of whizzing cold butter with sugar in the food processor, which let the dough come together in just minutes. The just-made dough was cold enough to be rolled out immediately. We then chilled it after rolling. For an even, golden color; minimal browning; and a crisp, crunchy texture from edge to edge, we baked the cookies at a gentle 300 degrees on a rimless cookie sheet on the oven's lower-middle rack.



INGREDIENTS

Cookies

- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 3/4 teaspoon salt

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

* For the dough to have the proper consistency when rolling, make sure to use cold butter directly from the refrigerator. In step 3, use a rolling pin and a combination of rolling and a pushing or smearing motion to form the soft dough into an oval. A rimless cookie sheet helps achieve evenly baked cookies; if you do not have one, use an overturned rimmed baking sheet. Dough covers can be

- ¼ teaspoon almond extract
- 2 ½ cups (12 1/2 ounces)
all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup (7 ounces) granulated
sugar
- 16 tablespoons unsalted butter,
cut into 1/2-inch pieces and
chilled

Royal Icing

- 2 ⅔ cups (10 2/3 ounces)
confectioners' sugar
- 2 large egg whites
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ⅛ teaspoon salt

combined and rerolled once, though the cookies will be slightly less tender. If desired, stir 1 or 2 drops of food coloring into the icing. For a pourable icing, whisk in milk, 1 teaspoon at a time, until the desired consistency is reached. You can also decorate the shapes with sanding sugar or sprinkles before baking.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 FOR THE COOKIES: Whisk egg, vanilla, salt, and almond extract together in small bowl. Whisk flour, baking powder, and baking soda together in second bowl.

2 Process sugar in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds. Add butter and process until uniform mass forms and no large pieces of butter are visible, about 30 seconds, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Add egg mixture and process until smooth and paste-like, about 10 seconds. Add flour mixture and process until no dry flour remains but mixture remains crumbly, about 30 seconds, scraping down sides of bowl as needed.

3 Turn out dough onto counter and knead gently by hand until smooth, about 10 seconds. Divide dough in half. Place 1 piece of dough in center of large sheet of parchment paper and press into 7 by 9-inch oval. Place second large sheet of parchment over dough and roll dough into 10 by 14-inch oval of even 1/8-inch thickness. Transfer dough with parchment to rimmed baking sheet. Repeat pressing and rolling with second piece of dough, then stack on top of first piece on sheet. Refrigerate until dough is firm, at least 1 1/2 hours (or freeze for 30 minutes). (Rolled dough can be wrapped in plastic wrap and refrigerated for up to 5 days.)

4 Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Line rimless cookie sheet with parchment. Working with 1 piece of rolled dough, gently peel off top layer of parchment. Replace parchment, loosely covering dough. (Peeling off parchment and returning it will make cutting and removing cookies easier.) Turn over dough and parchment and gently peel off and discard second piece of parchment. Using cookie cutter, cut dough into shapes. Transfer shapes to prepared cookie sheet, spacing them about 1/2 inch apart. Bake until cookies are lightly and evenly browned around edges, 14 to 17 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Let cookies cool on sheet for 5 minutes. Using wide metal spatula, transfer cookies to wire rack and let cool completely. Repeat cutting and baking with remaining dough. (Dough scraps can be patted together, rerolled, and chilled once before cutting and baking.)

5 FOR THE ROYAL ICING: Using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, whip all ingredients on medium–low speed until combined, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium–high and whip until glossy, soft peaks form, 3 to 4 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed.

6 Spread icing onto cooled cookies. Let icing dry completely, about 1/2 hours, before serving.