

MAKES ABOUT 22 COOKIES

Measure the molasses in a liquid measuring cup. If you find that the dough sticks to your palms as you shape the balls, moisten your hands occasionally in a bowl filled with cold water and shake off the excess. Bake the cookies one sheet at a time. If baked two sheets at a time, the cookies started on the bottom rack won't develop the attractive cracks. The cookies should look slightly raw and underbaked when removed from the oven. If you plan to glaze the cookies (see recipe under related content), save the parchment paper used to bake them.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup granulated sugar (about 7 ounces)
- 3 teaspoons grated orange zest
- 2 1/4 cups **unbleached all-purpose flour** (11 1/4 ounces)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 1/2 teaspoons **ground cinnamon**
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon table salt
- 12 tablespoons **unsalted butter** (1 1/2 sticks), softened but still cool
- 1/3 cup dark brown sugar (about 2 1/2 ounces)
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon **vanilla extract**
- 1/2 cup **molasses** (about 6 ounces), light or dark

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. In workbowl of food processor, process 2/3 cup sugar and 2 teaspoons orange zest until pale orange, about 10 seconds; transfer sugar to 8- or 9-inch cake pan and set aside.
2. Whisk flour, baking soda, spices, and salt in medium bowl until thoroughly combined; set aside.
3. In standing mixer fitted with paddle attachment, beat butter and 1 teaspoon grated orange zest with brown sugar and remaining 1/3 cup granulated sugar at medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Reduce speed to medium-low and add yolk and vanilla; increase speed to medium and beat until incorporated, about 20 seconds. Reduce speed to medium-low and add molasses; beat until fully incorporated, about 20 seconds, scraping bottom and sides of bowl once with rubber spatula. Reduce speed to lowest setting; add flour mixture and beat until just incorporated, about 30 seconds, scraping bowl down once. Give dough final stir with rubber spatula to ensure that no pockets of flour remain at bottom. Dough will be soft.

4. Using tablespoon measure, scoop heaping tablespoon of dough and roll between palms into 1 1/2-inch ball; drop ball into cake pan with sugar and repeat to form about 4 balls. Toss balls in orange sugar to coat and set on prepared baking sheet, spacing them about 2 inches apart. Repeat with remaining dough. Bake 1 sheet at a time until cookies are browned, still puffy, and edges have begun to set but centers are still soft (cookies will look raw between cracks and seem underdone), about 11 minutes, rotating baking sheet halfway through baking. Do not overbake.

5. Cool cookies on baking sheet 5 minutes, then use wide metal spatula to transfer cookies to wire rack; cool cookies to room temperature and serve. (Can be stored at room temperature in airtight container or zipper-lock plastic bag up to 5 days.)