

Andy's jam thumbprint cookies a perfect holiday treat



Photo Wendy Scheck

By Susie Iventosch

I received this beautiful photo of Andy Scheck's jam thumbprint cookies the other day. That got me thinking ... I can always use a great new cookie recipe! Not only are these visually pleasing cookies, but they are delicious too. I asked Andy if he had a good background story to these cookies, thinking perhaps his mom used to make them for him back in Germany, or they were a European tradition that he likes to make for the holidays. But his answer surprised me! I had given the Schecks some homemade huckleberry jam and he says that inspired Wendy to encourage him to make cookies with the jam. Well, that is very nice, but I am all out of huckleberry jam, so I used raspberry jam

in half the batch and melted dark chocolate for the other half and the cookies themselves are delicious. It took Andy a couple of attempts to get a dough that worked well for these cookies. The first recipe he tried came out too flat. So, he went back to the drawing board, did some research, and came up with this recipe. They have a perfect texture and are fun to make. I also learned something new, which is the use of pure vanilla powder, which Andy uses for the powdered sugar dusting on top of the cookies. I'd never bought it before, but he says vanilla powder is widely used in baking in Germany and they often sell it in small paper bags. Here he uses Cook's Pure Vanilla Powder, which is a product manufactured right here in California, in Paso Robles.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 stick butter, softened to room temp (approximately 3.8 ounces)
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup powdered sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 egg
- 1 2/3 cup all-purpose flour
- Pinch of salt
- Lemon zest from 1 Meyer lemon
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup of your favorite jam (I also made these with melted dark chocolate in the middle)
- For Sugar Dusting:
 - 1 tablespoon pure vanilla powder
 - 1 tablespoon powdered sugar

DIRECTIONS

Soften butter to room temperature. In a mixing bowl, beat together butter, granulated sugar and powdered sugar. Add vanilla and egg and beat until thoroughly incorporated. Add flour, salt and lemon zest and mix until integrated. Gather dough into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Form dough into small balls about 3/4 to 1-inch in diameter. (If dough is refrigerated longer, that is fine, but it will need to be taken out to soften a bit before rolling into the small balls.) Place balls on cookie sheet lined with parchment paper and push a dent in the middle with your thumb to form a flattened cookie with an indentation in the middle.

Bake at 390 F for about 15-18 minutes until edges become light brown. Allow to cool for 10-15 minutes. When completely cooled, sift vanilla powder-powdered sugar mixture over entire cookie. Then spoon a bit of jam, or melted chocolate into the indentation of the cookies. Enjoy!

I have changed Andy's method for making the cookies, because I usually cream the butter and sugar together before adding the dries, and he is used to mixing all of the dries first and then adding the butter and egg. Other than that, this is his imprint on jam thumbprint cookies and they are yummy!



Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.

One year later – What do we know about grain-free food investigation?

By Mona S. Miller, DVM

It has been 16 months since the U.S. Food and Drug Administration first publicly alerted pet owners about its investigation of the potential connection between grain-free dog foods and a particular form of heart failure. I wrote about this issue in the Aug. 22, 2018 edition of the Lamorinda Weekly. The potential connection - which I believe we can now consider real - appears to be the link between some boutique pet foods that are "grain-free" and taurine deficiency in the affected dogs. Taurine is an amino acid that is often found in meat and fish. It is essential for health of heart muscle, other skeletal muscle, retina and the central nervous system. This taurine-deficient heart disease linked to grain-free foods results in a specific type of heart muscle problem, called Dilated Cardiomyopathy. With DCM, the heart muscle is too floppy to contract well, and dogs go into heart failure fairly quickly.

The FDA first received a few reports in early 2014. After its initial public alert in July 2018, the numbers spiked and the vast majority of cases have been reported since then. There have been 560 cases in dogs reported, and 14 in cats. The mortality rate appears to be 20% for dog and 35% for cats. By all accounts, this is affecting a very small number of pets eating grain-free diets. However, as I tell my clients, no one wants their own dog to be included in this count, in what might very well be a preventable problem.

So, with three reports released by the FDA, and about 560 dogs reported, what do we know now? First, there appears to be no genetic or breed predisposition. A large variety of dog breeds have been reported, with Golden

Retrievers as the number one breed, and "mixed breed" in the number two spot. There have also been a variety of ages and weights, spanning the ranges of young to senior, and small to giant breeds.

More Golden Retrievers have been reported, but this is thought to be due to increased awareness among Golden Retriever social media forums. Breed-specific groups and activities are often more successful in encouraging owners to seek and finance specific diagnostic tests and work with their veterinarians to search for a diagnosis.

With respect to the types of diets involved, FDA's latest report in June provided the names of 16 brands of food that were named 10 times or more. The most common formulation was dry food (with 452 cases), but other formulations included raw, semi-moist and "other." Of the diets reported, more than 90% are classified as "grain-free" and 93% contained peas and/or lentils. A variety of protein sources were found in the diet, and no one type was found as dominant.

Tests for mineral and heavy metal compounds in the diets did not show any abnormalities. Likewise, several amino acids were checked for, including taurine, and no abnormalities were found (thus, the diets themselves were not taurine-deficient). The FDA is still investigating if there is altered taurine metabolism in the affected dogs.

To date, the FDA investigation has not reached any conclusions, and continues to seek collaboration with veterinarians and owners. Additionally, UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine is actively participating in related studies, including looking for biomarkers of taurine metabolism.

What can dog owners do? Discuss this issue with your

veterinarian at your dog's next wellness exam, especially if he is on a grain-free food. Some dogs are on a grain-free food because of a medical condition (skin or gut issues that seem responsive). But most dogs on grain-free foods, in my opinion, do not have a specific health problem that warrants these boutique diets. In these dogs, if there is no evidence of heart disease, then I recommend to my clients that the dog be transitioned to 25-50% grain-containing food, with minimal amount of peas/lentils, within a one-month timeframe. If a murmur is heard, then further tests are definitely indicated, including blood levels of taurine and heart muscle enzyme. Additional tests such as radiographs or ultrasound of the heart might also be indicated. This is a possibly preventable health problem in dogs, and definitely warrants further discussion with your veterinarian.



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her son, two cats and yellow Labrador. She attended UC Berkeley as an undergraduate, and received her DVM from UC Davis. She has been happy to call Lafayette home since 2001. She can be reached via email at MonaSDVM@aol.com. She welcomes questions from readers that may get incorporated into a column.

The following websites are useful resources:

- <http://lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1213/Grain-free-doesnt-mean-problem-free.html>
- <https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/news-events/fda-investigation-potential-link-between-certain-diets-and-canine-dilated-cardiomyopathy>
- <https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=19239&id=8989590>
- https://ccah.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk4586/files/inline-files/UPDATEOct2019ucd-diet-and-dcm-handout_0.pdf

Service Clubs Announcements

Lafayette Rotary Club

Step in on a Thursday and join us for our lunch meeting.
Thursday at noon Oakwood Athletic Club, 4000 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette.

**Next meeting
January 9**

www.rotarylafayette.org

www.facebook.com/Rotary-Club-of-Lafayette-CA

Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary

JANUARY WEEKLY MEETINGS

3: No Meeting

10: Linton Johnson, BART Chief Strategist & Spokesman

17: Michael Barrington, Your Paul Harris Dollars at Work

24: Lisa Lopez, Habits of Incredibly Happy People

31: Steve Zuk, Member Presentation

Breakfast, Friday 7:00 a.m.
The Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa, 3287 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette, CA
www.lamorindasunrise.com

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