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Christmas cookies help keep the holidays deliciously bright

By Susie Iventosch



Andy's Holiday Cookies Photos Susie Iventosch

This delicious spritz cookie recipe comes from our publisher, Andy Scheck, whose mom made them with her cookie press. Spritz cookies are so much fun because you can make all sorts of shapes and decorate them with colorful sprinkles. Cookies presses come in a variety of brands, and you can most likely find one at your local cooking store. They're not terribly expensive, and they come with an assortment of discs to make different shapes. But if you don't own a cookie press, you can always shape your dough into a log and slice it into round cookies. This is what Andy does and then he uses a fork to make a pattern on top of the cookie. At this point, they can be left plain, or topped with dark or milk chocolate.

To give my batch a little Christmas flair, I iced them and added some festive sprinkles. Also, I found that the original recipe had a little too much flour, (a lot depends on the size of the egg yolks) so I would suggest making your dough with just 4 ♦ cups of flour, and then add a little at a time. You want to be able to gather the dough into a ball so you can roll it into logs.

This recipe calls for vanilla powder, which has a more intense vanilla flavor than extract and it really comes through in the phenomenal flavor of these cookies. It is comprised of real vanilla extract in a dextrose (sugar) base, which gives it the white color. Diablo Foods carries three different brands of vanilla powder: Nielsen-Massey, Morton & Bassett and Cook's, which is the one I currently use.

INGREDIENTS

Andy's (Spritz) Cookies

3 sticks butter (12 oz.), at room temperature

1 3/4 cup granulated sugar

4 large egg yolks

5 cups flour (my dough was too dry with 5 cups, so I'd cut this back to 4 ♦ cups of flour)

3 tbsp. vanilla powder

3 tsp. baking powder

1 1/2 tbsp. milk

3/4 cups chopped hazelnuts *optional

Icing

1 cup powdered sugar

1 tsp. vanilla powder

1 tsp. light agave syrup (the agave gives the icing a nice sheen - can substitute corn syrup)

2 tbsp. +/- milk

Mix flour and baking powder and set aside. Place the butter in the bowl of your standing mixer and beat until creamy. Add sugar and vanilla powder and continue to beat until blended. Add egg yolks and beat well. Slowly add the flour alternately with the milk and continue to beat until you get a stiff dough, but not too dry.

Gather the dough into a ball and then place it on a large piece of plastic wrap. Spread the dough out along a line and form into three logs, each about 10 inches long. Wrap the logs completely with the plastic wrap and

refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

When you're ready to bake the cookies, preheat the oven to 325 F and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Remove the dough from the refrigerator and slice into 1/4-inch thick discs and place them on the prepared baking sheet. Bake for 12-15 minutes, checking them at about 10 minutes. Baking time will vary based upon your oven, but mine took the full 15 minutes. Turn the baking sheet once halfway through the baking. Remove from oven and cool completely before frosting them with icing or melted chocolate.

For the icing, sift the powdered sugar and blend with the remaining ingredients, adding the milk a little bit at a time, until you arrive at your desired icing consistency. You should be able to spread the icing on top of the cookie with a spoon. For the chocolate, you can either completely cover the top with the chocolate or drizzle it from the end of your spoon for a patterned effect.

Maple Pecan Shortbread Cookies

Crispy, crunchy, brown sugar shortbread, made with maple extract and toasted pecans, is one of our favorite cookies ever and perfect for your holiday cookie collection. We dip half the cookies in maple glaze and garnish with more toasted pecans for a beautiful, finished look!

The key to making good shortbread is using good quality butter and keeping the ingredients simple. Also, you want to handle the dough as little as possible - just enough to gather the dough into a ball and shape it. And finally, you need to chill the dough for at least 30 minutes before baking it to a golden-brown.

INGREDIENTS

Cookies

1 1/2 cups unsalted butter, softened to room temp (8 oz. or 2 sticks)

1 1/2 cups packed, light brown sugar

2 cups all-purpose flour

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon maple extract

1 cup finely chopped toasted pecans

1 cup coarsely chopped toasted pecans (for on top of the icing)

Maple Icing

2 cups powdered sugar, sifted

2 tablespoons milk

1 teaspoon pure maple syrup

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 325 F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Place butter in a mixing bowl or the bowl of your standing mixer. Beat butter for about two minutes until very creamy. Add brown sugar and maple extract and continue to beat until fluffy. Add flour and salt and blend until well-integrated. Finally stir in 1 cup of the finely chopped toasted pecans and mix well. The mixture will be rather thick at this point.

Place dough on a large sheet of plastic wrap and roll into a log, 2-inches in diameter. You can make 2 or 3 logs, if it's easier! Completely wrap the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerator for about 30 minutes to firm up.

Remove dough from the refrigerator and slice the logs into 1/4-inch rounds. Place rounds on prepared baking sheets.

Bake for approximately 20-25 minutes, or until cookies begin to look golden brown. Turn the tray 180 degrees halfway through the baking. Remove from oven and cool completely.

Once cooled, dip each cookie in the maple icing (recipe below) to cover half of the cookies. Immediately sprinkle coarsely chopped pecans over the icing so they stick to the moist icing. Allow icing to harden before storing cookies.

*Note - if you plan to make the cookies ahead, store them before icing them and ice them when you are ready to serve them. The icing can make the cookies too soft, if you store them with the icing on.

Chocolate Chip Corn Cookies

These corn cookies are like the best sugar cookie you've ever tasted, but even better with toasted pecans and dark chocolate chips. Chewy in the middle with nice crispy edges, and made with corn flour, they are so good! They can also be made gluten-free, by substituting gluten-free all-purpose flour or a paleo flour for the all-purpose wheat flour in the recipe. Bob's Red Mill Grain-free Paleo Baking Flour is a good one to use. Then just keep the same amount of corn flour and corn meal as the original recipe.

I love Professor Torbert's Orange Corn Flour and Corn Meal for these cookies. It's a unique kind of corn flour, literally made from corn that has deep orange kernels, packed with carotenoid antioxidants. Plus, it tastes really great in these cookies.

When you flatten the dough balls with the bottom of your measuring cup or any other flat utensil in your kitchen, they look like they came straight from the bakery!

INGREDIENTS

6 oz. unsalted butter, at room temperature (1 1/2 sticks)

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1/2 cup light brown sugar, packed

1 large egg

1 tsp. vanilla extract

1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour

1/2 cup corn flour or masa harina (not corn meal) there is a big difference between corn meal and corn flour, just be sure this one is corn flour?

1/4 cup yellow corn meal (this one is corn meal)

3/4 tsp. baking powder

1/4 tsp. baking soda

1/2 tsp. salt

1 cup dark chocolate chips

1/2 cup toasted chopped pecans (If you love pecans, feel free to add an extra 1/4 cup of these! It won't hurt a bit.)

1/2 cup granulated sugar (for rolling the dough balls in)

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 F. Line one or two baking sheets with parchment paper. If you only have one baking sheet, just bake the cookies in two batches. Be sure to put new parchment paper for each batch.

Place butter in the bowl of your mixer or a large mixing bowl and beat for a minute or so until creamy. Add both sugars and beat until fluffy. Stir in vanilla.

Beat in all-purpose flour, corn flour and cornmeal. Beat until blended and well-integrated. Stir in chocolate chips and pecans and mix well.

Form dough into balls about 2-inches in diameter. Place the 1/2 cup of extra granulated sugar in a small bowl. Roll dough balls in this sugar, coating all sides. Place the dough balls about 2-inches apart on your prepared baking sheets.

Using the bottom of a flat-bottomed 1 cup measuring cup, dip the bottom of the cup in the remaining sugar and press down on each dough ball to create a disc about 3/4-inch thick or so.

Bake for 10-12 minutes, or until the edges are just turning golden-brown. Remove from oven and transfer the cookies on the parchment paper to a cooling rack. Cool completely before removing from the parchment paper. You'll want to eat all of this right away, but we suggest eating one or two, and then storing them in an airtight container or freeze for later!

Professor Torbert's Orange Corn Products: <https://professortorberts.com/>



Photo Susie Iventosch



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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. Or visit <https://treksandbites.com>

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[back](#)

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