

A Baker's Cookie Guide

Tips and Techniques for Better Cookies



Volume I

Cookies and Their Methods

The Prepared Pantry

A Baker's Cookie Guide

Tips and Techniques for Better Cookies

"I'm not sure my mother really understands just what her cooking means to me. It represents everything warm and good and cozy."

Carmen Jackson Crofton

Washington Post, 1999

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How to Troubleshoot Cookies

If you're like the rest of us, once in a while your cookies don't turn out quite right. We put together this guide to troubleshooting cookies. Just read down this list of problems and solutions until you find how to make your cookies perfect.



If your cookies are too tough . . .

You may have used too much flour or a flour with too high of a protein content. Unless you want a chewy cookie, do not use bread flour. Check your measurements--the cookies may not have enough fat or the amount of sugar may be wrong.

If your cookies are too crumbly . . .

They may have too much sugar, shortening, or leavening or may not be thoroughly mixed. Try adding more eggs.

If your cookies are too hard . . .

They may have been baked too long or at a temperature that was too low. Too much flour or not enough shortening or liquid will make them hard also.

If your cookies are too dry . . .

The same elements that make cookies too hard, may make them too dry. Try baking them at a higher temperature for a shorter period. Substitute brown sugar (with its higher moisture content) for part of the granulated sugar.

If your cookies are too brown . . .

The cookies were most likely baked too long or at too high of a temperature. Too much sugar may make a cookie brown too readily.

If your cookies are not browned enough . . .

The baking temperature was too low, they were not baked long enough, or there was too little sugar.

If your cookies spread too much . . .

The baking temperature may be too low. Too much sugar, shortening, or leavening will cause spread. If pans are greased with too much shortening, spread may occur. Add a little more flour or chill your dough before forming the cookies.

If your cookies don't spread enough . . .

The opposite conditions that create too much spread may cause your cookies not to spread enough. There may not be enough sugar, shortening, or leavening, or the

temperature is too high. Try adding more oil to the pan and baking at a lower temperature.

If the edges or crust turns out sugary . . .

The cookies probably have too much sugar. The dough may have been inadequately mixed.

If your cookies have a poor flavor . . .

Make sure all the flavoring ingredients were added. Dated or low quality ingredients may not impart strong enough flavors. Improperly washed baking pans will sometimes cause a cookie to taste bad.

If your cookies stick to the pans . . .

The pans probably weren't greased adequately. Too much sugar will make cookies stick. Cookies are usually easier to remove from their pans immediately after coming from the oven.

Ingredients

Cookies are wonderful concoctions of flour, sugar, and a fat—usually butter and eggs. To these basic ingredients, we add fruit, nuts, and flavors. If we start out with compromised ingredients, the cookies from any recipe will be inferior.

Sugars

Sugars not only sweeten, they add moisture and tenderness to the cookie and help the cookie brown. Sugar grains cut into the butter when the two are creamed together creating tiny air pockets for a lighter, airier cookie.

Always use the type of sugar called for in the recipe. Since superfine sugar melts faster than does granulated, it will create more spread. Brown sugar adds a caramel flavor and more moisture than granulated. Powdered sugar has added cornstarch and makes a firmer, drier cookie.

Measure sugar in measuring units designed for dry ingredients. For granulated sugar, use a knife to level the top of the measure. Pack brown sugar firmly into the measuring unit.

Always use fresh, soft, brown sugar. Hardened brown sugar will not add enough moisture to the cookie. An old trick to soften brown sugar is to add a slice of bread to the container. Since sugar is hygroscopic, that is it attracts moisture, it will draw the moisture from the bread. In a day or two, the sugar will be soft and you can throw the bread away.

Flours

Use good quality, fresh flour. If your bag of flour has been sitting open too long, it may be dry or in a humid climate, it may have absorbed moisture.

For a more tender cookie, use pastry flour. Bread flour with its gluten creates a tough, chewy cookie and is unsuitable for most recipes. All-purpose flour is suitable for most cookies.

Measure flour as you would white sugar, in a dry measure and scrape the top off with the back of a knife. Do not dip the measure into the flour. Flour packs easily and scooped flour results in too much flour for the recipe. Whisk or sift the flour to lighten it and then carefully spoon the flour into the measure.

Butter

Nothing tastes like butter. It contributes much of the flavor that we love in cookies, some of the color, and much of the tenderness. Butter acts as a shortening, that is, it “shortens” the gluten strands found in flour and gives the cookie a soft, melt-in-your mouth texture.

Margarine can be substituted for butter. Margarine often has more water than butter and some adjustment to the recipe may be necessary if you substitute margarine for butter.

Shortening can be used in place of butter but the cookie is likely to be very different. A cookie with shortening will have less spread, will tend to be crisper, and will lack that buttery flavor—even if you use butter-flavored shortening.

Eggs

Eggs add structure and fat to the cookies. The eggs, as they are beaten, create bubbles that make the cookies lighter and the protein in the egg solidifies to create a firmer, higher profile as it bakes.

Always use fresh eggs and use the size of eggs called for in the recipe. Set the eggs on the counter for thirty minutes before using—warmer eggs will make a lighter cookie.

Fruits and Nuts

Where would we be without raisin cookies or those nut-filled cookies?

Nuts become rancid easily. The smaller the nut pieces, the quicker they will spoil. Always taste the nuts before using them in the recipe. If they taste even slightly rancid, discard them. For longer life, store your nuts in the refrigerator, or better yet, the freezer.

To enhance the flavor of nuts, consider toasting them. Place them one layer thick on a baking sheet and bake at 300 degrees. The type and size of the nuts will determine the baking time, anywhere from three minutes to ten minutes. Determine when the nuts are toasted by both fragrance and color. Always let the nuts cool and reabsorb the oils before mixing them into the batter. Nuts can also be toasted in a skillet.

Dry fruit becomes hard as it ages. Steam raisins and other dried fruit by pouring boiling water to just cover them and let stand until plump—the length of time will be a factor of the freshness and type of fruit. Pat them dry on paper towels. Kids

who turn their noses up at raisin cookies may change their minds if they experience cookies with plumped raisins.

Spices

The wonderful world of spices was designed for cookies. Use the best spices that you can buy, keep them covered, use them while they are fresh. There is a world of difference between quality spices and inexpensive spices.

Buy the best cinnamon that you can find. Taste-test your cinnamon for quality. Good cinnamon will taste sweet and have almost a citrus flavor. Cheap cinnamon will be astringent and bitter. Good quality cinnamon will make a marvelous difference in your baking.

Leaveners

While breads use yeast—an organic leavener—cookies rely on chemical reactions to give them lift and make them palatable. In this article, we will explore these chemical leaveners and how they work: baking powder, baking soda, and cream of tartar.

Baking Soda

Baking soda is a powerful alkaline used primarily to leaven cookies, muffins, and cakes. Because it is alkaline, it reacts with acids in a batter as soon as it is mixed causing bubbling and a thickening of the batter. It does not require the heat of the oven to begin leavening.

Generally, only acidic recipes call for baking soda. Buttermilk, juices, unalkalized cocoa, and molasses are common acids used in baking. The reaction of the alkaline baking soda with an acidic batter has two effects: it creates the carbon dioxide bubbles that leaven the batter and it neutralizes the acid in the batter. Neutralizing the acid changes the taste—buttermilk, for example, no longer has its characteristic acid tang.

Typically, recipes use 1/4 teaspoon baking soda for each cup of flour. Very heavy batters or very acidic ones may use more. Occasionally drop cookies call for more baking soda but that is to allow the cookie to brown more easily. A batter with a lower pH will brown more easily.

Baking Powder

While baking soda is alkaline, baking powder is a mixture of an alkaline baking soda and two acids designed to create a neutral compound. It therefore reacts with itself using the moisture of the batter as a catalyst. Like baking soda, this reaction creates carbon dioxide bubbles.

The baking powder generally used in the kitchen is double-acting: it reacts at room temperature in the presence of moisture and again in the oven in the presence of heat. The result is the extra lifting power necessary to make a cake light and airy. Because the baking powder reacts with itself, it does not alter the pH of the batter.

Often a weakly acidic recipe will call for both baking soda and baking powder. The baking soda will react with the acid in the batter but the reaction will not be strong enough and is bolstered with the extra baking powder.

Cream of Tartar

Cream of tartar is a by-product of the wine-making industry and is derived from tartaric acid. As an acid, it is the counterpart to baking soda and when the two are combined they create a chemical reaction which produces carbon dioxide. Most recipes that call for cream of tartar also call for baking soda. In some recipes, cream of tartar is used to increase the acidity in the batter to preserve the tang of buttermilk or an acidic juice used in conjunction with baking soda.

Other Leaveners

There are other chemical leaveners, though they are rarely used in today's kitchens. In addition, mechanical means are used for leavening. Creaming butter and sugar together entrains air in the batter. Steam is used to lift products. Egg whites are whipped to capture tiny air pockets and thereby lighten products.

How to Mix Your Cookies

Most cookies use a two stage method of mixing. In the first stage, the sugars and fats are creamed together until light and fluffy and air is entrained in the mixture. The eggs added one at a time and beat into the creamed mixture incorporating even more air into the mixture. Without the proper entraining of air in the creaming stage, cookies will always be unsatisfactory.



In the second stage, the dry ingredients and any liquids are added to the creamed mixture. For those recipes that call for the addition of both liquids and dry ingredients, the recipes usually specify that the liquids and dry ingredients are added alternately starting with the dry ingredients. There is a rationale for this. Oil (fats like butter) and water (liquids like milk) do not mix. The flour acts as a buffer absorbing the liquids and is therefore added first. Adding all of the flour before the liquid may require over mixing and create a tougher cookie.

The two most common mixing faults are over-mixing and failure to distribute the dry ingredients uniformly. (Often, the baker over-mixes the batter in an attempt to distribute the dry ingredients.) You can beat the creamed mixture thoroughly—the objective is to entrain as much air into the mixture as possible but once the flour is added, mix only until the flour is moistened. Over mixing does two things: it develops the gluten in the flour making a tougher cookie and it drives the entrained air from the batter so the cookie is not as light.

To ensure that leavenings and spices are evenly distributed in the batter, mix all dry ingredients together thoroughly before combining the dry mixture with the creamed mixture. Do so with either a whisk or by sifting the ingredients together.

Fold any fruit and nuts gently into the batter stirring no more than necessary to keep the batter light and airy.

How to Bake Your Cookies

The greatest cookie fault is over baking. If your cookies seem dry, reduce the baking. When done and hot on the cookie sheet, most cookies appear to be under baked. It's better to under bake than to over bake cookies.

Always bake the cookies on the middle shelf—the lower shelf is too close to the heating element and will over bake the bottom of the cookies. If you bake more than one sheet a time, either switch the lower sheet with the upper sheet part way through the baking or place one sheet on top of another sheet to insulate the bottom of the pan.

Learn how your oven bakes. If experience tells you that your oven bakes faster than called for in most recipes, lower the heat by 25 degrees. Better yet, use an ovenproof thermometer to test the heat in your oven.

If you have a lot of cookies to bake and a limited number of baking pans, consider lining the pans with sheets of foil or parchment paper. You can load the foil or parchment paper with cookie dough while the sheets are on the counter. As soon as the cookies come from the oven, slide the sheets from the pans and set the pans aside to cool. Remove the cookies from the parchment paper or foil to cool on wire racks. As soon as the pans are cool, load them again with sheets of cookies. Never place cookie dough on warm pans as it will increase the spread of the cookies and affect cooking time.

Storing Your Cookies

Freezing Dough

If you haven't discovered the convenience of freezing cookie dough, the next time that you bake cookies, try freezing part of your dough. For refrigerator-type cookies, form the dough into logs and freeze so that the dough can be sliced when almost thawed. For other cookies, wrap the dough in plastic and press as much air from the wrap as possible then place the wrapped dough inside a plastic bag to freeze.

Most cookie dough can be kept in the freezer compartment of the refrigerator for up to three months and in a freezer for up to six months. (The freezing compartment of your refrigerator is not as cold as a freezer.)

Freezing Cookies

Most baked cookies freeze well. The exception is chocolate glazed cookies; freezing often creates a white frost on the chocolate. Freeze each type separately—never freeze crisp and chewy cookies together. Freeze delicate cookies on a baking sheet before wrapping them individually and storing them in containers.

Refreshing Cookies

All cookies that have been frozen can benefit from refreshing. Spread them on a baking sheet and stick them in an oven heated to 325 degrees for three to eight minutes depending on the thickness of the cookies. They are done when they start to smell fresh-baked.

Even if the cookies have not been frozen, consider refreshing them before serving. Fresh from the oven, cookies that are several days old taste as if they were just baked.

If soft or chewy cookies become hard or stale in the cookie jar, add a slice of bread. By the next day, the moisture will have migrated to the sugar-rich cookies making them soft and moist again.

Freezing Bar Cookies



Most bar cookies freeze particularly well. There are two ways to freeze bar cookies: wrap them individually or wrap and freeze the whole cake after it has cooled completely.

Bar cookies should last for months in a freezer (not the freezer section of your refrigerator). We have frozen [Hermits in a Bar](#) for six months with no noticeable loss of quality.

Types of Cookies and How to Bake Them

There are many different types of cookies. We utilize six categories though more categorization is possible. Each category has its place. Here, we review our six types of cookies and provide tips for each.

Bar Cookies

When you are in a hurry, nothing is faster than a bar cookie. Mix, pour the batter in a pan, and bake. You don't have to form individual cookies—the most time consuming task in many recipes.

If you would like a tender, cake-like cookie, use all-purpose or pastry flour. Don't over mix--over mixing will develop the gluten and make for a tougher cookie. Instead of greasing the baking pan, consider lining the pan with foil or parchment paper. Lightly spray the foil with vegetable spray. Be sure and spread the dough evenly in the pan for uniformly baked cookies.

Cake-like bar cookies should be baked until a toothpick inserted in the center of the pan comes out clean. When lightly pressed with a fingertip, the top should spring back. For brownie-type cookies, the tops should be dull—not glossy—and an imprint will remain when touched. After baking, holding the edges of the paper or foil, lift the loaf of cookies from the pan. Use a sharp, serrated knife and trim the edges. Then use a ruler to mark the cuts for uniform bars.

Bar cookies can be cooled in the pan or on a rack. They can be stored in the pan but we prefer to cut the cookies into bars as described, and wrap them individually in plastic.

Drop Cookies

These are the most common cookies and probably what we think of first when cookies come to mind. There are more recipes for drop cookies than for any other type.

Make each cookie of equal size and height for uniform baking. (An ice cream scoop with a release mechanism helps make uniform cookies.) Bake until the cookies are delicately browned and an imprint remains if lightly touched with a finger. Do not over bake the cookies. Over baked cookies are dry and hard. Remove them immediately to racks to cool. Let them cool completely before stacking.

Formed Cookies

These are formed into balls between the palms of your hands. Some are flattened with a fork or the bottom of a glass before baking. Some are left

Cookies in Uniform

To make formed cookies from uniformly-sized balls of dough, roll the dough into a log the diameter that you wish the balls to be then slice the log into equal chunks. Form the chunks into balls.

round—the oven mellows the butter and cookie softens to a flattened shape. It's easy to make uniform, round cookies. To make them the same size, use a kitchen scale and weigh each ball. If you don't have a kitchen scale, use a ruler so that each cookie has the same diameter.

Bake these cookies until they are delicately browned and an imprint remains if lightly touched with a finger. Remove them immediately to racks to cool and let them cool completely before stacking.

Refrigerator Cookies

In some ways, refrigerator cookies are the most convenient cookies. You can mix the dough ahead of time and bake them when needed and bake only as many as are needed. Dough can be stored for a week in the refrigerator and much longer than that in the freezer.

After mixing, form the dough into a round or rectangular log and chill thoroughly. Use a sharp, serrated knife to cut cleanly especially if there are nuts in the dough. Use a ruler to get the cookies all the same thickness. When slicing round logs, roll the dough after each cut to keep the log uniform.

Bake the cookies until they are delicately browned and cool them on racks.

Rolled Cookies

Handle and chill the dough as for refrigerator cookies. Roll the dough out on a very lightly floured surface. Most recipes call for the dough to be about 1/4-inch thick. Use a toothpick to make sure that the dough is uniformly the right thickness.

A thinner cookie will make for a

The Joys of Refrigerator Cookies

Baking cookies seem to fill the house with a sense of well being and peace. Perhaps it is the smell of butter, vanilla, and spices emanating from the hot oven. Maybe it is the love and caring attention that is evident in cookies. Home, love, and cookies seem to go together.

Consider refrigerator, or icebox, cookies for the holidays. They can be made up ahead of time—even months ahead—and stored until ready to bake. Baking up those stored refrigerator cookies is mess free, takes little time, and you only need to bake what you need for the moment. Drop cookies are quick cookies; refrigerator cookies are convenient cookies.

Refrigerator cookies are also attractive cookies. Nothing beats the uniform slices and consistent shape of refrigerator cookies. To keep that uniform shape, slice while the dough is still cold and firm and turn the log after every few cookies to keep the log round. If the cookies have a flat edge, mold them back to shape with the curl of your finger before baking.

Roll the refrigerator cookies into logs (or blocks) as directed in the instructions then wrap them in waxed paper and aluminum foil. The logs can be refrigerated for a week or frozen for months. When you are ready to bake, remove the logs from the refrigerator to thaw. It's easier to slice a log that is not completely thawed and the cookies bake fine—though you may need to add another minute or so.

crisper cookie. Cut the dough with cookie cutters. Get as many cookies from each rolling as possible, Successive rollings, with the flour from the counter incorporated into the dough and with more handling of the dough, will make for tougher cookies.

Bake the cookies until they are delicately browned and cool them on racks.

Pressed Cookies

These cookies take special equipment--a cookie press--but can be made into wonderfully attractive shapes. They are great to make with kids. Kids are fascinated with both the shapes and technique.

Follow the manufacturer's directions for forming cookies. The dough must be pliable. If the dough gets too soft, return it to the refrigerator and let it chill.

Bake the cookies until they are delicately browned and cool them on racks.

Cookie Techniques

A Primer for the Perfect Cookie

Kids think that cookies are one of the four basic foods (the others being cakes, pies, and pastries). Cookies almost take on that importance with adults during the Christmas season. If cookies are so important, we ought to know how to make superlative cookies, not just good ones. (Shown to the right are Old-Fashioned Oatmeal Raisin Cookies and Snickerdoodles. These cookies are combined in Grandma's Country Cookie Pak.)



The following constitutes a primer for those much better than average cookies.

1. Most cookies (and most cakes) call for butter or shortening, a critical ingredient that provides flavor, affects spread, and controls texture. In most cookie and cake recipes we beat the butter or shortening to entrain air in the product. It becomes a leavener, like baking powder and baking soda. The trapped air makes the cookie lighter. Always beat butter until is light and fluffy. (This is difficult to do without an electric mixer.)
2. Sugar is usually added next. Continue beating until there are no lumps.
3. The eggs and flavoring are next. To avoid getting eggshells in the mixture, break the eggs in a cup and then add to the bowl and beat well.

4. Combine the dry ingredients in a separate bowl. Mix them well with either a sifter or a wire whisk.
5. Add the dry ingredients to the creamed ingredients. If the recipe calls for a liquid, alternate the liquid with the dry ingredients. Stir or beat until combined but do not over mix. Over mixing will develop the gluten in the flour and create a tough cookie and will drive the air from the mixture making the cookie denser.
6. Add the chocolate pieces or nuts if called for. Mix with a spoon instead of the electric mixer as the electric mixer may break the chocolate pieces or nuts.
7. If you are making drop cookies, use a scoop to make uniform sized and shaped cookies. Use quality baking sheets. (We don't like the insulated sheets for most cookies. We want the cookies to cook from the bottom as well as the top.)
8. Most cookies can be tested for doneness by look and feel. Light colored cookies should begin to brown around the edges. Dark cookies will lose their gloss. If you touch them with your finger, there should barely remain an imprint.
9. Most cookies should be removed and cooled on a rack. If left on the rack, they will continue to cook from the heat in the metal and the cookies will sweat and become soggy on the bottom.

Are They Done Yet?

Are my breads, cookies, or cakes baked and ready to come out of the oven yet?

The ability to tell when products are baked seems to cause more consternation than almost any other phase of baking. And of course, it is important. Over baked cookies are dry and hard; under baked bread is soggy. But you can get it right.

Though the tendency is to under bake breads, the tendency is to over bake cookies. Take them out just before you think they are done; you won't be wrong often.

My father is a consummate cookie baker. If you ask him what his secret is, he'll tell you: "I don't over bake cookies." The difference between a just right cookie and an over baked one is dramatic.

Make cookies uniform in size. Not only are they more attractive but different sizes of cookies take different times to bake.

Most recipe writers tell you to leave the cookies on the sheet for a minute or two. Cookies continue to bake on a hot baking sheet. Sometimes that's necessary for an easy release but for most recipes, we remove them as quickly as we can.



If the cookies look a little soggy in the middle, then leave them on the sheet for a few minutes and they will firm up.

Most cookies should be gold in color, not brown. Both the amount of sugar and soda in the recipe will affect how fast a cookie browns.

Chocolate cookies represent another challenge: you can't tell if they are browning. If you are baking with a new recipe, bake a few cookies and check them for doneness before baking the entire batch. Chocolate cookies will tend to lose their "wet" look when done.

Many bar cookies will have a dry, shiny crust when done.

How to Make the Very Best Sugar Cookies

1. Everyone loves sugar cookies at Christmas. But sugar cookies don't always turn out right. We've compiled this list of tips and techniques to help you make the very best sugar cookies.



1. Measure ingredients accurately, especially the flour. Too much flour will make your cookies hard and dry. If you scoop the flour with the measuring cup instead of spooning sifted flour into your cup, you are likely to have 20% too much flour.
2. Sugar cookies are made by the creaming method. This is the most important step in making sugar cookies—it incorporates the air into the dough that acts as a leavening agent. Use the paddle attachment of your electric mixer to cream the sugar, salt, and spices with the butter or shortening. Cream the ingredients together at low speed, not high. For light cookies, cream the mixture until it is light and fluffy. For a denser, moister cookie, cream only until the mixture is paste-like.
3. Add the eggs and liquid after creaming, beating these in at low speed.
4. Mix the flour into the creamed mixture only until it is combined. If you over-mix, you will develop the gluten and make a tougher cookie.

Sugar Cookie Tip

Because each reroll works a little more flour into the dough and develops the gluten a little more, consider rerolling the scraps into a log. Refrigerate the log and then slice 1/4-inch thick slices from the log for refrigerator cookies. Instead of fancy shapes, they'll be round--but they'll be more tender.

5. Choose a low protein flour, preferably pastry flour, for your sugar cookies. Avoid bread flours with their high protein content. All purpose flour is an acceptable compromise.
6. If the dough is too soft to work easily, chill it until firm. The dough should be pliable but not squishy soft. Handling of the dough with warm hands will make the dough soft.
7. Use no more flour than necessary to dust the counter. The flour will work into the dough for a drier, tougher cookie.
8. Too much re-rolling will make for tougher cookies. Not only does successive re-rolling work the dusting flour into the dough, the continued working of the dough develops the gluten.
9. When cutting shapes, make the cuts as close together as you can to minimize the amount of dough that will be re-rolled.
10. Most recipes call for the dough to be rolled to 1/8 inch in thickness. This creates a crisp cookie. For a moister, less crisp cookie, roll the dough to 1/4 inch only.
11. Remove the cookies from the counter with a thin metal spatula.
12. When garnishing cookies with sprinkles, drop the decorations from a height of eight or ten inches for a more even distribution.
13. The size of the cookies will affect bake times. Put like-sized cookies on the same sheet.
14. Do not over bake cookies. Thin cookies will bake in seven or eight minutes at 350 degrees. Thicker cookies will take ten or twelve minutes. Cookies on darker pans will bake in less time. When done, the cookies will still be pale-colored with just a tinge of brown at the edges.
15. Cool cookies on a wire rack. Do not frost them until they are completely cooled.

Baking Biscotti the Easy Way

“Biscotti just sounds like too much trouble.”

It really isn't. Instead of forming cookies, slice a loaf. Instead of putting cookies on the rack to cool, put them in the oven to crisp. We would like to show you how. Once you know how, you'll be able to bake better biscotti than what you usually find in coffee shops. Before we begin, let's set the record straight. You don't have to have a cup of coffee to enjoy biscotti. At our house, biscotti is one of our favorite cookies and we enjoy biscotti with tall glasses of milk. Arm your kids or grandkids with cups of hot chocolate or tall glasses of milk and explore a whole world of biscotti.



Mix the biscotti according to package instructions or the recipe. Divide the dough into two equal portions. On a large prepared baking sheet, use your hands to form the dough into two flattened logs, leaving space for the logs to expand. The logs should be 2 1/2-inches wide by 1/2- to 3/4-inches high. It doesn't hurt to make the logs a little wider if necessary.

Bake according to instructions or until the logs have spread and are firm to the touch. The tops will be a light tan color. Cool the loaves on the pan on a rack. Place the cooled logs on a cutting board and slice diagonally into 1/2-inch wide slices with a sharp serrated knife.

Place the cookies on the baking sheet with a cut side up and return to the oven. Bake for 10 minutes at 300 degrees then turn the cookies over and bake for 8 minutes or until the edges of the biscotti begin to lightly brown. Cool on wire racks.

How to Cut Picture Perfect Bar Cookies

Would you like your bar cookies to be picture perfect-like they came from the bakery? Here's how:

- Bake the cookies in parchment or foil lined pans. Extend the paper above the edges of the pan. Allow the cookies to cool completely in the pan. Lift the sheet of cookies from the pan and move to the cutting board by grasping the edges of the paper and pulling upward.
- Remove the paper or foil and trim the edges straight and square.
- Use a tape measure or ruler to mark the cuts with a knife. The cookies can be cut into squares, rectangles, or diamonds.
- Use a sharp, serrated knife to cut all the way through the base of the cookie.



Cookie Decorating Tips

- Let your cookies cool completely before decorating. If the cookie is not completely cool, the frosting will trap moisture and the cookie will sweat.
- Decorating sugar is graded by size with AA being the most popular large crystal size. It's easiest to buy in white. That's okay. Put some white crystals in a bowl, add a drop or two of food coloring, stir, and you have colored sugar crystals. There's no need to stock a rainbow of colors. You can purchase [AA sugar crystals](#) on our site.
- Turbinado sugar is made of large crystals and is amber in color. We love it. It is less expensive than white decorating sugar. Consider turbinado where the amber color is not a problem. You can purchase [turbinado sugar](#) on our site.
- For firmer icing that will not spread and smear, use a recipe that calls for egg whites or use meringue powder. A couple tablespoons of meringue powder will firm up the icing nicely. You can purchase [meringue powder](#) on our site.
- Frosting, especially with meringue powder, dries quickly. Place a damp paper towel over each bowl of frosting that you are not using.
- Don't have a piping bag? You can make do with a heavy plastic bag. Just snip a tiny corner of the bag and squeeze the frosting through the clipped corner.
- How do you get those nice, neat edges on frosted cookies? Use a fine tip with your icing set and pipe a border around the edge of the cookies. Let the frosting set. It helps to have a frosting that sets fairly hard, with egg whites or meringue powder. Then spread frosting between the piped edges. You can purchase a [deluxe eight tip icing set](#) on our site.



It's really easy to drizzle a little chocolate (or frosting) on your cookies, cakes, or pastries.

Here's how: Place ½ cup chocolate chips in a small heavy-duty plastic bag. Microwave the bag and chips for 40 seconds on high heat. Knead the chips to mix the melted chips through those that are not melted. Microwave again for 10 to 15 seconds or until the chips are completely melted.

Cut a tiny corner from the plastic bag and squeeze a narrow stream of chocolate through the cut corner. You'll quickly get the knack and be able to create decorative patterns of your choice. You can use the same technique with frosting.

- You can put food coloring right in the dough to make colored cookies. After baking, the color will not be as intense as it was in the raw dough.

How to Decorate the Edges of a Cookie

It's fun to decorate the edges of a cookie; you can do that with refrigerator cookies.

Cookies with minimal spread work best for decorating. Look for recipes that have a higher flour to sugar ratio or for those without leavening, for best results. (Refrigerator cookies with a high sugar content are usually light and crisp because the sugar in the dough melts in the heat of the oven. Cookies without leavening tend to be rich and shortbread like but decorate nicely. [The Festive Fruit and Oat Cookies](#) and [The Coconut Cranberry Cookies](#) are perfect for edge decorating.)



Use large colored [sugar crystals](#), [turbinado sugar](#), decorating sprinkles, decorating jimmies, crushed candies, or nuts. Simply roll the log of dough in the decorating materials prior to slicing the cookies. If you roll the log with the sugar or other decorations in waxed paper or parchment paper, you can press them into the surface of the dough.

Some instructors use an egg white wash to assure that the candies stick to the log. Except for nuts, we don't. We don't find it necessary and the moisture from the egg white tends to melt the candies or sugar crystals into a blurry mess.



To showcase the edges, we usually cut the slices just a bit thicker before baking. We color white sugar crystals any color we like by mixing a few drops of food coloring with the crystals. You can buy large bags of white crystals to make a collection of different colors.

Turbinado is an excellent coating sugar with its amber color and large crystals. [Learn more about turbinado sugar.](#)

How to Paint Cookies

There are two ways to paint cookies—before and after they are baked. We would like to acquaint you with both methods.

We usually think of painting cookies as a kid's activity—and it is. Kids can spend hours making cookies into shapes and painting them. It addresses two passions—cookies and creativity. Allow kids imagination to run both in the shapes they make and the colors they paint.



Painted cookies are also a fun craft for older kids and adults. We have seen pictures of painted cookies that are truly beautiful. Carefully painted cookies make wonderful decorations for Christmas or holidays. And since they are painted with edible paint, you can eat those creations that you don't keep.

Painting Cookies before They are Baked

Raw cookie dough can be painted because it is fairly dense and the paint stays on the surface rather than soaking in. We have tried both egg yolk based paints and cornstarch based paints. The egg yolk based paints are dense and opaque and create a colored "skin" on the cookie. When the cookie expands in the oven, the colored skin does not expand with the cookie and therefore does not leave complete coverage. Because of the pigment in the yolks, the colors are yellow tinted. Use egg yolk based paints and paint cookies before they are baked when the yellow tint from the yolk is acceptable and when the edges of the cookie do not have to be covered. The antique looking flower on the left (top picture) in the accompanying picture was painted on a peanut butter cookie with egg yolk based paints. You can check out the recipe for the [Painted Peanut Butter Cookies](#).

The same paints were used to paint the lighter-colored cookie on the right (again, top picture). This is a sugar cookie made with our [American Classic Sugar Cookie Kit](#). Notice that the sugar cookie did not expand as much as the peanut butter cookie and therefore has more coverage.

The flowers in the above picture were created by molding bits of dough as you would mold clay. Kids will have a great time molding animal shapes and characters. Help them press the shapes to a uniform thickness so that the cookies will bake uniformly. The seams formed by pressing the bits of dough together act as lines to guide your child in his or her painting.

Edible paint can also be made with cornstarch. The red heart (middle picture) was made with a simple cornstarch-based paint. The cornstarch does not cover as well nor create the skin that egg yolks do but the colors are true and the paint seems to expand with the cookies a little better.

Cookie dough can be used as a canvas and kids can paint scenes or designs with egg yolk based paint. The rectangular cookies to the right are chocolate shortbread cookies painted with egg-yolk based paints. We tried a shortbread recipe because shortbread is dense and expands very little. Interestingly, the paint left an embossed effect on the surface of the cookies.



Painting Baked Cookies

Once the cookie is baked, the surface has risen and is much more porous. To paint baked cookies, the porous surface is covered with a hard shelled frosting, usually a frosting with meringue powder added to create a smooth, firm surface. On the frosted surface, bright colors and crisp lines are painted using undiluted food coloring. Just dip the tip of the paint brush right in the food coloring bottle.

To the right, are sugar cookies that are frosted and then painted with food colors. We used an [American Classic Sugar Cookie Kit](#) to produce both the cookies and the frosting but you can use your own recipe. The cookies come in both chocolate and vanilla and the royal icing mixes contain meringue powder. We also carry [meringue powder](#) for icings if you care to do your own.

Whether painting on unbaked cookies or frosted cookies, simple water color brushes work well. They are inexpensive, you can buy them in different widths, and they clean up with hot water.

Here you will find the recipes that you need to paint your cookies. We hope that you and your kids have a wonderful time.

Easy Meringue Frosting

Meringue powder is made with powdered egg whites (plus starches and flavors). Reconstituted egg whites dry hard leaving a shell on the frosting. You can purchase meringue powder at baking supply stores, on the internet, or at The Prepared Pantry. (Click here for [meringue powder](#).)

3 tablespoons meringue powder for icing
1/4 cup water
2 1/2 cups powdered sugar, more or less

Stir the meringue powder and water together until smooth. Add enough of the powdered sugar to obtain the desired consistency for spreading. Completely cover any leftovers.

Edible Cookie Paint Recipes

(for Decorating Un-baked Cookies)

Egg Yolk Based Paint

2 large egg yolks
1 teaspoon water
food coloring

Stir the yolks and water together until smooth. Add the food coloring. Clean up with water.

Cornstarch Based Paint

3 tablespoons cornstarch
water
food coloring

Stir enough water into the cornstarch to make a slurry. Add the food coloring.

Shipping Cookies to Loved Ones

Nothing sends the message that you care quite like home-baked goods. But often those loved ones are far away. How do you successfully send favorite cookies to a loved one away from home?

Choose sturdy cookies to ship and ones that won't smear the frosting. Wrap cookies loosely and individually in plastic. Package them in small containers. If you want to ship a lot of cookies, use several smaller containers and place them in a bigger box. Cushion the smaller boxes in packing "peanuts" or crushed newspaper.

Fresher cookies are better cookies. Make sure that the cookies are wrapped well enough that they won't dry out and get them to the shipper right away. Many shipping services offer remarkably quick deliveries. We use UPS Ground for most of our shipments and they deliver within two days to addresses several states away. For overseas and long distances, consider drier cookies that don't stale as quickly. And remember, the closer to Christmas that you ship, the more likely that the shipper will be backlogged and delivery will take longer. Lower fat cookies last longer so are better for shipping long distances.

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