



Chef Judi's Very Best Christmas Cookies

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The Holiday Season always means lots of cookie baking at my house. Friends and family have come to expect they'll be getting a nice big plate of interesting and tasty treats, an expectation that I heartily encourage. These recipes represent the best of the best, the cookies and treats that are always requested.

This is a great time to get the children involved with the fun, particularly with the cookies that you shape and decorate (I've found they're generally not that interested in the measuring and mixing part of the process). Cover your work counters with an old, clean sheet, and then cover the children with aprons. Give each their own "decorating station" filled with frostings, food colors, colored sugars, and decorating candies. Let them run with their imaginations and enjoy their fun!

Use the best ingredients you can afford. These are all better tasting if you use real butter, but if margarine is what you can afford, then it is acceptable to substitute (except for the shortbreads and butter cookies where butter is important to the taste). Use only butter or stick margarine; substitutes or butter mixes will produce an inferior product. Use vanilla extract rather than imitation flavoring if you can.

Some general information: unless it's indicated differently, sugar is plain white table sugar, flour is the all-purpose kind, and the eggs are large. I don't know if altitude makes a difference in baking cookies, but all these recipes have been tested at sea-level only. I use salted butter, because unsalted tastes like cream cheese to me, and I don't see the point.

The doughs that require refrigeration can be kept in the refrigerator a few days before baking. Just leave them at room temperature for an hour or so, so that the dough is loose enough to be rolled out. Dough without egg will be good for a week.

As you're rolling out and forming these doughs, gather the scraps

back together, refrigerating again if necessary for the dough to hold shape and be firm enough to roll out again.

The dough with a lot of butter will not need to be baked on a greased sheet. The recipes that require a greased, greased and floured, or parchment covered cookie sheet are noted. If there's nothing said about preparing the cookie sheet, there's no need for anything other than a clean baking surface.

Use your imagination, both in the decorating and the ingredients for the cookies. Of all baking, cookie-baking is probably the most forgiving. If the cookies look a little strange, they'll more than likely still taste great. Just give them a newer, more interesting name and claim your own authorship. If they don't taste quite so good, slap some frosting and small candies on the top. Sweet almost always wins out.

Every time I find an interesting way to decorate cookies, I put the picture into a file. I'm a good cook but get into a rut in decorating, so these ideas come in very handy at the holiday time. I would suggest you start your own file. Even if you are creative, we can all use a little bump and new ideas some times.

Enjoy these cookies, and enjoy the reactions from friends and family.

Happy Holidays!

Chef Judi

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Butter Stars

About 8 dozen cookies

These can be frosted and decorated in all sorts of pretty ways (for that matter, they can be any shape you want). One very attractive variation is to pipe the frosting around the shape of the star with silver dragees (in the baking section or at specialty shops) or cinnamon candies set at each point of the star. Try color gel for deeper frosting color.

2 ¼ cups sifted flour
¼ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. salt
½ cup butter (1 stick), softened
½ cup sugar
1 egg
Butter frosting (recipe follows)

Combine flour, baking soda, and salt.

Cream butter with sugar. Add egg and beat until fluffy. Stir in the flour to blend well. Refrigerate one hour.

Section dough into quarters. Roll out sections on a lightly floured surface to about 1/8 inch thickness. Cut into star shapes with template or cookie cutter. Place 1 inch apart onto greased baking sheets.

Bake in preheated 375° oven for 10 minutes, until just lightly browned at the edges. Remove to a rack and cool. Frost and decorate.

Butter frosting

Cream ¼ cup butter and beat in 2 to 2 1/2 cups confectioners (powdered) sugar, alternating with 2 tbs. milk and 1 tsp. vanilla so that it holds shape. Color the frosting with food color as desired.

Cherry Kisses

Makes about 48 cookies

These are hands down my husband's favorite cookies. They are very pretty, taste great, and they not hard to make. Margarine can be substituted for butter here, as the cherry flavor is predominate. Unwrap the candy kisses before you start the cookies; it takes a lot longer than you'd think.

Preheat oven to 350°.

1 cup butter, softened
1 cup powdered sugar
2 tsp maraschino cherry juice
½ tsp almond extract
few drops red food color
2 ¼ cups flour
½ tsp salt
½ cup maraschino cherries, drained and chopped (10 oz jar)
48 milk chocolate candy kisses

Cream butter and powdered sugar together. Beat in cherry juice, almond extract, and food coloring. Stir in flour and salt, then stir in cherries.

Shape the dough into 1-inch balls. Place about 2 inches apart on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake 8 to 10 minutes, until edges just begin to brown. Top with candy immediately as they come out of the oven, pressing down a bit (don't be concerned if the cookie top cracks a little). Remove to rack and cool.

Chocolate Wrinkles

Makes about 4 dozen

My husband's second favorite cookie. Be sure not to overcook them, because a part of their goodness is the chewiness. Rolling the cookie dough balls in powdered sugar before baking gives these tasty cookies their distinctive wrinkled look. An electric mixer makes these a snap to put together.

2 cups plus 2 tbs flour

2 tsps baking powder

¼ teaspoon salt

½ cup butter or margarine at room temperature

1 ¾ cups sugar

3 eggs

1 tsp vanilla

4 oz (4 squares) unsweetened chocolate, melted

½ cup powdered sugar

Mix flour, baking powder, and salt.

Beat butter and sugar until fluffy. Add eggs and beat until the mixture is a pale yellow. Blend in vanilla and melted chocolate, then add flour mix, just to combine. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease cookie sheets lightly.

Shape dough into 1 ¼ inch balls and roll in powdered sugar. Place about 1 ½ inches apart on sheet. Bake about 12 minutes, until cookies are puffed and look crackled.

Cool on a rack.

Chocolate Macadamia Nut Rounds

Makes 2 dozen

I love macadamia nuts, and I think they're extra fabulous with chocolate, lots of chocolate, as this recipe has. These are high on my list of favorites. Again, an electric mixer makes short work of putting these together.

Preheat oven to 375°. Lightly grease cookie sheets.

½ cup butter

½ cup packed brown sugar

2 tbs sugar

1 egg

1 tsp vanilla

1 1/3 cups flour

½ tsp baking powder

4 ½ oz semisweet chocolate (¾ cup chocolate chips), melted

¾ cup roughly chopped macadamia nuts

Combine butter, sugars, egg, vanilla, and beat until fluffy. Stir baking powder into flour and add it slowly to the bowl, just to blend. Add melted chocolate to mix, and then add nuts.

Drop by heaping teaspoons onto baking sheet, about 2 inches apart. Bake 10 to 12 minutes, until the top of the cookies look dry. Let cool on the cookie sheet 4 or 5 minutes before moving them to a rack to finish cooling.

Chocolate Macaroons

Makes 2 dozen

Yum – chocolate and coconut. Does it get any better? These are dead-easy to put together and taste wonderful.

Preheat oven to 325°. Liberally grease cookie sheets.

1 oz (1 square) unsweetened chocolate, melted

1 1/3 cups flaked coconut

1/3 cup sweetened condensed milk

½ tsp vanilla

Stir coconut, milk and vanilla into melted chocolate. Drop by teaspoonfuls on cookie sheet, about 1 inch apart.

Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Carefully remove from pan to cooling rack (if the cookies stick or get misshapen, just press the pieces back together into cookie form).

Christmas Wreaths

Makes 3 doz

These are very pretty cookies with a wonderfully delicate taste. They are a little fussy to make and a bit fragile, but they do make an impressive addition to your cookie trays.

14 tbs butter ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus 2 tbs) butter, at room temperature
1 cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt
1 egg
1 tsp almond extract
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour
green food color

Cream butter, sugar, and salt together, then beat until fluffy. Beat in egg and extract, then gradually add flour until blended.

Divide the dough in half. Add food color to one half until it's a pastel green. Cover and refrigerate both portions for 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350°.

Pinch off large-walnut-sized pieces each from the colored and uncolored doughs. Roll separately on floured board, making foot-long ropes. Holding a piece of each at one end, twist them together to make a rope. Cut into 5 inch lengths and form into circles (wreaths), pinching the ends carefully together. Place 1 inch apart on cookie sheet. Decorate with dragees, candied cherry pieces, cinnamon candies, etc.

Bake 8 to 10 minutes, just until the bottoms start to brown. Let rest on cookie sheet for 2 or 3 minutes to firm a bit before you remove them to a rack to cool.

Cinnamon Stars

Makes about 30 cookies

These are unusual in that they get iced before baking. A food processor makes easy work of the mixing, but isn't required. To grind the almonds, you can use your blender; just be careful to use the pulse function so you don't end up with almond paste. The cookies get very elegant if you can find edible glitter (at specialty baking shops) to sprinkle on them before baking.

Preheat oven to 275°. Line baking sheets with parchment or lightly grease and flour them.

2 cups almonds, ground fine

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

2 tsps ground cinnamon

dash of salt

1 egg white

Combine almonds, sugar, cinnamon, and salt. Add egg white and mix until dough pulls together and makes a ball. Dust surface with powdered sugar; pat dough out with your fingers to about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thickness. Cut out stars with template or cookie cutter dipped in powdered sugar. Use a spatula to transfer stars to cookie sheets.

Mix icing:

Mix 1 cup powdered with 1 egg white, then beat until the mixture is stiff but still spreadable. Spread a thin layer of icing on each star, as close to the edge as you can.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until the cookies are firm and lightly browned around the edges. Remove from baking sheets and cool on racks.

Coffee Crisps

Makes about 30 cookies

Although simple to make, these are quite elegant looking. The glaze drizzle is fun to do! Garnish with a chocolate-covered coffee bean for an extra treat.

1 ¼ cup flour

1 tsp ground cinnamon

pinch of salt

½ cup butter at room temperature

¼ cup packed brown sugar

1 tsp instant coffee dissolved in ¼ cup water (instant espresso gives a deeper coffee flavor)

Combine flour, cinnamon, and salt.

Beat butter and brown sugar until fluffy. Beat in coffee liquid.

Gradually add flour to mixture just until blended. Shape the dough into a block about 1 ½ inches square and 8 inches long. Wrap in plastic or waxed wrap and refrigerate until firm enough to slice, at least 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350°.

Slice dough into ¼ inch slices, and put cookies on an ungreased baking sheet about 1 inch apart. Bake 12 to 14 minutes, just until golden and firm. Cool on racks.

Make coffee glaze:

Dissolve 1 tsp coffee granules in 2 tsps water. Add ½ cup powdered sugar and mix until smooth. Put the glaze into a sandwich-sized plastic bag. Snip off a small corner of the bag and drizzle the glaze over the cooled cookies. Put a coffee bean in the center of the cookie.

Decorated Vanilla Cookies

Makes about 4 dozen cookies

These are basic vanilla cookies, perfect for shaping and decorating. Let your imagination run wild both with the decorating and with the additions you can make to this basic dough to create your own new traditions (see Shortbread Variations for some ideas).

½ cup butter
½ cup packed brown sugar
2 tbs sugar
1 egg
1 tsp vanilla
1 1/3 cups flour
½ tsp baking powder

Combine flour and baking powder.

Cream butter and sugars, add egg and vanilla and beat until fluffy. Slowly mix in flour mixture, just until it's completely blended in.

Cover or wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour, until the dough is firm enough to hold shape as you roll it out.

Preheat oven to 375°.

Put onto a lightly floured surface and roll out to ¼ inch thickness. Cut with templates, cookie cutters, or freehand. Decorate.

Put cookies 1 inch apart onto ungreased cookie sheet and bake 8 to 10 minutes, just until lightly browned.

Cool on cookie sheet for a minute or two, then remove to finish cooling on rack.

Easiest Peanut Butter Cookies

Makes 24 cookies

I'm always on the lookout for good cookies that don't require flour, because of my sister's gluten intolerance. These fit that bill as well as being great-tasting. They're also incredibly simple to make. Perfect to throw together and pop in the oven for surprise company.

Preheat oven to 350°.

1 cup sugar
1 egg
1 cup peanut butter, creamy or crunchy
1 tsp vanilla
sugar for rolling

Beat sugar and egg well, add peanut butter and vanilla, and mix well.

Shape into walnut-sized balls, roll in sugar, and place on cookie sheet. Using a fork, press the cookies gently into rounds.

Bake for 10 minutes or until the cookies are lightly browned and set. Let cool on baking sheet for a couple of minutes. Remove to a rack to cool.

Fruit Chew Cookie Bars

Makes about 2 dozen

Bar cookies make your baking day a bit easier. You just need to mix everything up, put them in the pan and bake. Cut these into finger lengths after they've cooled a bit. Filled with fruit and nuts, the smaller bites are quite satisfying.

Preheat oven to 350°. Generously butter the inside of an 8 x 8 pan.

1 cup flour

1 cup sugar

½ tsp. salt

1 tsp. baking powder

1 cup chopped dates

½ cup red sour cherries, drained and chopped (pie cherries)

1 cup chopped walnuts

2 eggs

4 tblsp. melted butter

1 tsp. vanilla

powdered sugar for rolling

Sift together flour, sugar, salt, and baking powder. Add the fruit and nuts.

Lightly beat eggs and stir in the melted butter and vanilla.

Pour liquid ingredients into flour and fruit, stirring well to combine.

Pour batter into prepared pan. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes. Cool pan on rack. When just warm to the touch, cut into finger-length bars. Roll bars in powdered sugar, and continue to cool on rack.

Gingerbread Cookies

Makes about 7 dozen cookies or 2 dozen ornaments

What kind of holiday cookie tray would it be without gingerbread cookies? Maybe I can't imagine it because I love ginger so much. At any rate, these are especially tasty, and they're easy to put together.

This dough is also excellent for making tree ornaments or special package decorations. When it's rolled to ½ inch and baked a little longer, they are sturdy creations. When making ornaments, remember to add a hole at the top before baking for your string or ribbon to hang them. The point of a chopstick is perfect.

4 cups flour
2 tbs unsweetened cocoa powder
5 tsp ground ginger
2 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp ground cloves
1 tsp baking powder
1 cup butter at room temperature
1 cup sugar
1 egg
½ cup molasses

Sift the flour, cocoa, spices, and baking powder together.

Cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg and then the molasses. Now add the flour mixture and mix until it's all well blended.

Divide the dough into workable portions (at least 4 or 6 pieces), wrap, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.

Preheat oven to 350°. Line baking sheets with parchment or lightly

grease and flour them.

Put a portion of the dough onto a floured surface. Knead it a bit to get it workable, but not enough to soften it. Roll the dough out to 1/8 inch thickness (1/2 inch for ornaments) and cut into desired shapes. If necessary, use a spatula to transfer the cookies onto a baking sheet.

Bake the cookies for 10 minutes, just until the edges begin to brown. (Ornaments are baked for 20 minutes.) Remove from oven and let them cool on the pans until they're firm enough to move to cooling racks, 2 or 3 minutes.

These cookies can be decorated with candies, colored sugars, etc., before baking. Or they can be frosted and decorated after they've cooled. A simple icing can be made of egg white and powdered sugar beaten together until firm. Color portions with food color or gel, then ice the cookies and decorate. A plastic storage bag with a small corner snipped off makes a fine pastry bag substitute for making icing designs.

Holiday Macaroons

Makes 3 dozen

Another incredibly easy and quick recipe that brings great results. The addition of green and red candied cherries in the center of these cookies brightens up any cookie collection.

Preheat oven to 350°. Liberally grease cookie sheets.

2/3 cup sweetened condensed milk

3 cups shredded or flaked coconut

1 tsp vanilla

red and green candied cherry halves

Mix the 3 ingredients well. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto the prepared baking sheet. Press a cherry half into the center of the cookie.

Bake cookies for 10 – 12 minutes, until they're a light brown at the tips of the coconut.

Remove from oven and use spatula to move the cookies to a rack to cool. Reshape the ones that stick or try to fall apart. You may have to return the baking sheet to the oven for a few seconds to soften them enough to get them off the sheet.

Jam Tarts

Makes 2 dozen

These are double-decker butter cookies with a cutout in the middle of the top layer filled with jam. You'll need a small (1 – 1 ½ inch) cookie cutter design for the cutout. A star is particularly nice, but any shape, including a smaller circle, will do. These are a very tasty and pretty addition to your cookie tray.

Any jam or marmalade is good, so go for your favorite – or for the color you want to add to your tray.

¾ cup butter, at room temperature
1/3 cup powdered sugar
1 ¼ cups flour
½ cup cornstarch
1 tbs lemon juice (fresh is preferable)
1 tsp grated lemon peel
2/3 cup jam

Beat butter and powdered sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in flour, cornstarch, lemon juice, and peel.

Divide dough in half, rolling each half into a log about 2 ½ inches across. Wrap in plastic and chill for at least an hour.

Preheat oven to 350°.

Cut each log into 1/8 inch thick slices. For half the slices, cut out a center decorative shape. Place uncut discs on cookie sheet. Brush with water and place cookies with cutouts on top of whole cookies. Spoon jam into the cutout section.

Bake 8 minutes or until set. Cool on racks.

Lemon Shortbread

Makes about 40 cookies

Buttery shortbread is always a treat. Here, the lemon gives a hint of tartness that's quite refreshing. The butter is not softened or kept at room temperature in this recipe; the dough works around bits of butter to keep it layered and to give the melt-in-the-mouth quality, in the same way you use cold butter and ice water to make the best pie crust.

2 ½ cups flour

2/3 cup sugar

1 cup chilled butter

2 tbs minced lemon zest

2 tbs lemon juice

Put flour, sugar, butter, and zest into a bowl. Work with a fork or fingers to get a mixture that looks like coarse meal. Add the lemon juice and work it in just until a dough forms. Roll into a log about 2 inches in diameter. Wrap in plastic or wax paper and refrigerate for an hour.

Preheat oven to 375°

Slice log into ¼ inch thick slices. Place on baking sheet about 1 inch apart and bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until just starting to brown at the edges. Let rest on the baking sheet 1 or 2 minutes before moving to a rack to cool.

Lemon Tarts

Makes 2 dozen

These are bite-sized lemon pies, made of a silky cream cheese pastry filled with lemon curd. They are fussy in that you're making pastry shells for small muffin containers and that the lemon curd takes some attention and time. But they are well worth it. They taste great and will win you raves.

Lemon Curd

1/4 cup butter, melted
1 tsp grated lemon peel
1/4 cup lemon juice (the juice of one lemon)
2/3 cup sugar
2 eggs

In the top of a double boiler, whisk together all the ingredients. Place top over simmering water and cook, whisking often, until the mixture is smooth and thickened. Remove top of double boiler to rack and allow to cool until just warm to the touch.

In the meantime, make the pastry.

Preheat oven to 350°.

1/2 cup softened butter
3 oz. cream cheese, softened
2 tbs powdered sugar
1 tbs water
1 1/4 cup flour

Combine butter, cream cheese, and powdered sugar, beating until light and fluffy. Blend in water, then add flour, mixing to make a

smooth dough. Roll out to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thickness. Cut into 4 inch circles and drop the circles onto the mini-muffin tins, gently folding and shaping pastry to fit into cups. Pierce the pastry with a fork around bottom and sides.

Bake pastry shells 18 to 20 minutes, until golden brown. Cool in the pans on a rack.

Fill the shells with the lemon curd, then remove the tarts from the pan. They're wonderful as is, but you can also add a small dollop of sweetened whipped cream.

Mini Cheesecakes

Makes 12

Again, a little fussy, but very well worth the effort. These came about because a niece wanted cheesecake for her birthday. However, in our family, it would take several pies to serve everyone. These provide satisfying bites of delicious taste. They are made in standard muffin pans instead of the minis. Crush the cookies by putting them in a plastic storage bag and rolling over them with your rolling pin.

Preheat oven to 350°.

24 chocolate wafer cookies
3 tbs butter, melted

Line the muffin pans with foil baking cups. Spray the cups with vegetable oil spray.

Crush the wafer cookies finely; add them to the butter. Spoon the crumbs into the prepared cups, dividing evenly. Press with the bottom of a glass to compact the crumbs. Bake for 5 minutes, to almost set the crumbs.

Prepare the cheesecake:

8 oz cream cheese, at room temperature
¼ cup sugar
2/3 cup ricotta cheese, at room temperature
2 eggs
2 tsps vanilla
¼ cup preserves (seedless raspberry, blueberry, or cherry are good choices) heated just to spreadable consistency

Beat the cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Beat in the ricotta

cheese, then the eggs and vanilla. Beat until smooth.

Spoon the cheesecake batter into the baking cups, filling to a scant $\frac{1}{2}$ full.

Bake the cheesecakes for 15 minutes. The filling will still be jiggly in the middle, not completely firm. Spread 1 tsp of the warmed preserves on top of the cheesecakes. Allow to cool a bit, then refrigerate the cheesecakes until firm. If you wish, you may remove the cakes from the foil, although they serve more easily in the cups. The foil also makes a pretty addition to your tray.

Molasses Crinkle Bites

Makes 3 dozen

Molasses goodness in yummy bites. These are always a favorite on the cookie tray.

2 cups flour
2 tsp baking soda
1 ½ tsps ground ginger
1 tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp ground cloves
½ tsp salt
½ cup butter, softened
1 cup packed brown sugar
2 tbs vegetable oil
1/3 cup molasses
1 egg
Sugar for rolling

Sift together the flour, spices, and salt.

Beat the butter and brown sugar until light colored. Beat in oil to blend. Add the molasses and egg and beat until blended. Stir in the flour mixture to blend. Wrap in plastic and chill until firm, at least one hour.

Preheat oven to 375°. Grease cookie sheets.

Form dough into one inch balls and roll in sugar to coat. Place 1 inch apart on baking sheet. Bake about 10 minutes, until the center of the cookie surface is barely dry. Cool on sheets 5 minutes before transferring to rack to completely cooled.

Peanut Butter and Jelly Bites

Makes about 5 dozen cookies

Who can deny the good of PB&J? These little jewels will satisfy, and they look great.

1 cup flour
1 tsp baking soda
pinch of salt
½ cup packed brown sugar
¼ cup sugar
1 cup smooth peanut butter
½ cup butter, at room temperature
1 egg
½ tsp vanilla
glace cherries or cherry preserves

Sift flour, baking soda, and salt.

Combine sugars and add peanut butter and butter. Beat until smooth and creamy. Add egg and vanilla, mixing well. Gradually add flour mixture, blending until smooth. Cover and refrigerate at least one hour.

Preheat oven to 375.

Shape dough into 1 inch balls. Place 1 inch apart on baking sheets. Using the handle of a wooden spoon, make an indent in the center of each ball.

Bake 10 to 12 minutes until lightly browned and set. Cool on sheets 2 or 3 minutes to set; remove to racks to cool. Fill centers with preserves or glace fruit.

Peppermint Meringues

Makes 4 dozen cookies

I tried these because of my sister. She loves peppermint, but more importantly, she's gluten intolerant, meaning she can't eat any wheat or grain products, so most cookie recipes are off her list. Meringues turned out to be a very good alternative, and they've become a favorite for everyone else because they taste so good.

They're kind of fussy because the meringue is better done with a good beater and they need to be baked at a low temperature for quite a long time, but they are a bit of heaven with each bite.

Meringues work best when the egg whites are at room temperature. They're prettiest if you have both green and red crushed candies. Crush the candy in plastic storage bags, using your kitchen mallet.

Be careful that no yolk gets into the whites. If it does, or a piece of shell drops in, use an egg shell half to scoop it out.

Whites of 2 eggs
pinch of salt
1/8 tsp cream of tartar
½ cup sugar
2 peppermint candy canes, crushed

Preheat oven to 225°. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper or foil, shiny side down.

Beat egg whites until foamy. Add salt and cream of tartar and continue beating until soft peaks form when beaters are lifted. Beat in sugar 1 tbs at a time. Continue beating until meringue is very stiff and glossy.

Put meringue into a plastic storage bag; snip the corner of the bag to

make a 1 inch opening. Squeeze 1 ½ inch mounded circles of meringue onto parchment spaced 1 inch apart. Sprinkle crushed peppermint candy over mounds.

Bake 1 ½ hours; meringues will look dry but not browned. Turn off oven and let meringues dry and cool with the oven door ajar. Loosen cookies from parchment.

Rosemary Shortbread

Makes about 40 cookies

Shortbread again, this time with an interesting and unexpected delicate herb flavor. Be sure to try other herbs, too.

$\frac{3}{4}$ lb butter, at room temperature

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup sugar

2 tbs minced fresh or 2 tsps dried crushed rosemary

$2 \frac{2}{3}$ cup flour

Cream butter and sugar, blend in herbs, then fold in flour to blend. Refrigerate for an hour.

Preheat oven to 375°. Line baking sheets with parchment paper.

Roll out dough to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thickness. Shape with cookie cutter or glass dipped in flour.

Place on cookie sheets and bake for 18 to 20 minutes, until golden at the edges.

Cool on racks.

Shortbread Variations

Makes 5 dozen

Since you've come this far, you know how big a part shortbread and butter cookies play in my repertoire of wonderful baked goods. You cannot get away from the importance these types of cookies play in Holiday compilations.

I hope you'll have tried some, if not all, of the previous recipes; they all are truly wonderful. However, if you've found yourself here and still looking for inspiration, this should provide what you need.

This again is a basic shortbread, but with variations you may not have found before. With the 7 variations, you could use this one dough for an entire tray full of different cookies. The basic dough can be refrigerated for up to a week or frozen for up to six weeks. Thaw frozen dough in the refrigerator.

1 cup butter at room temperature
¾ cup powdered sugar
2 tsp vanilla
2 cups flour
¼ tsp baking powder
pinch of salt

Combine flour, baking powder, and salt.

Cream butter and powdered sugar, beat in vanilla. Gradually add flour mixture and beat until well combined.

For basic shortbread cookie: form the dough into two logs and refrigerate for at least an hour. Cut in 1/3 inch thick slices and place on lightly greased baking sheets. Bake at 350° for 10 to 12 minutes, until just browned a bit on the bottom. Remove to rack to cool.

Chocolate-dipped shortbread: After basic cookies have cooled, dip half of cookie into melted chocolate chips ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup or so is what you'll need).

Peanut butter and jelly: Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of peanut butter into basic dough. Refrigerate, then slice, but make an indentation in the center of the cookie and fill that with jam or jelly (about $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp) before baking.

Chocolate-Mint: Stir 1 package (4.67 ounce size) of chocolate mints that you've chopped up into basic dough. Refrigerate and bake as with basic cookies.

Toffee shortbread: Chop up 1 cup of almond brickle (such as Heath bars or Almond Roca) into dough. Proceed as above.

Red Cinnamon Candy cookies: stir $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped red cinnamon candies into basic dough.

Nut-crust cookies: Roll shaped logs of dough in $\frac{3}{4}$ cup finely chopped nuts – pecans, almonds, macadamia, anything you like.

Snowman cookies: Chill the dough, but don't form into log. When firm, roll in 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ inch balls, 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch balls, and 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ inch balls. Put on baking sheet in snowman shape. Decorate using frosting after they're baked.

These are just a few of the kinds of things you can do with this versatile cookie dough. Try adding your favorite candy or flavoring, or shaped into any kind of creature you can think of.

Spicy Stamped Cookies

Makes 36 cookies

The stamped part of the name comes from the use of rubber stamps, the kind found at stationary or craft stores, that are used to design the top of the cookies. They also can be formed using traditional cookie cutters or free-hand, or simply baked plain. They are very tasty.

3 cups flour
1 ½ tsp ground cinnamon
¼ tsp ground cloves
¼ tsp ginger
¼ tsp nutmeg
¾ cup butter, at room temperature
1 ½ cups packed brown sugar
1 cup almonds, ground fine
1 egg
2 tbs milk

Combine flour and spices.

Cream butter and sugar until well blended and fluffy. Add almonds, egg, and milk, beating to mix. Stir in flour and spice mixture and blend well.

Divide dough in half, shaping each half into a disc. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm enough to roll, at least 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350°.

Roll out dough on lightly flour surface to 3/8 inch thickness. Dust stamp surface with flour or cornstarch and press firmly onto dough to imprint the design. Trim dough to shape. Place on cookie sheets 1 inch apart. Bake 12 to 15 minutes; cool on racks.

Tea Cakes

Makes 4 dozen

These are also called Russian Teacakes and Mexican Wedding Balls, so I'm staying with Tea Cakes. They're another shortbread variation, this time rolled in a ball, then rolled in powdered sugar after they are baked. They have a wonderful melt-in-your-mouth quality.

1 cup butter at room temperature

¼ cup powdered sugar

1 tsp vanilla

2 cups sifted flour

2 cups finely chopped nuts (hazelnuts, pecans, walnuts, or almonds)

1 cup powdered sugar for rolling cookies

Cream butter and powdered sugar. Add vanilla and beat. Add flour, stirring to blend. Mix in the nuts.

Cover and refrigerate the dough until firm, at least 1 hour.

Heat oven to 400°.

Roll dough into 1 inch balls, and place on cookie sheets. Bake 10 – 12 minutes, just until starting to brown on the bottom. Roll the balls in powdered sugar and put on rack to cool. Roll them again in the powdered sugar after they have cooled.