

Crazy for Christmas Cookies



When the expression "you are what you eat" comes to mind, I can think of a lot of foods we might want to avoid but cookies are definitely one we should have way more often. Somehow I think that if every major international summit meeting started out with world leaders gathering at a table with platters of great homemade cookies and ice cold milk for dipping, this world would be a whole lot better place to live in.

One of the really neat traditions some still embrace during the holidays is filling tins or boxes with an assortment of homemade cookies to give to family and friends to enjoy. Wouldn't you agree that there's a lot more to that type of gift than buying something at the mall? Try this...picture rosy-cheeked children enjoying cookies, giggling and smiling in front of the Christmas tree after coming in from a snowball fight or sledding. O.K...now visualize those same children sitting in front of the new 3-D mega gonzo video gaming system (retail price: \$400) playing "Death Robots From Venus Invasion" with glassy eyes and those slack jaws. You pick the scenario you'd prefer.

Ten years ago a delightful gentleman from Scotland worked with me producing wooden gift boxes and every time I make this recipe I think about his wonderful Scottish brogue. His wife made these decadent homemade shortbreads for Christmas and they were always so very good.

Old Fashioned Scottish Shortbread

(Makes 8 Wedges)

2/3 cup unsalted butter (room temperature)

1/2 cup sugar

1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

1/2 cup rice flour (adds crunch!)

1/4 teaspoon baking powder

1/8 teaspoon salt

Preheat your oven to 325°F and grease a round shallow 8-inch cake pan. With an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Sift in the flours, baking powder and salt. Mix well by hand.

Press the dough neatly into the prepared pan, smoothing the surface with the back of a large spoon. Prick all over with a fork and then score into 8 equal sized wedges (just like cutting a pizza).

Bake until golden, 40 to 45 minutes. Leave in the pan until cool enough to handle, then unmold and recut the wedges while still warm. Store in an airtight container.

This next recipe has such great history to it which somehow seems fitting for an old fashioned Christmas.

Moravian Molasses Thins

(5 to 7 dozen 2 ½-inch cookies)

If you've ever visited Old Salem in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, you know how marvelous the Moravian baking is. This recipe is adapted from one used in Old Salem and pre-dates the Moravians coming to this country. Paper-thin cookies go all the way back with the Moravians to central Europe and the cookies come in several varieties. This one is traditional for Christmas. They're addicting!

Whisk together thoroughly:

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 ½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon ground cloves
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
½ teaspoon baking soda

Beat on medium speed until well blended:

1/3 cup molasses
¼ cup solid vegetable shortening or good-quality lard
½ cup packed dark brown sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla

Gradually stir the flour mixture into the molasses mixture, then knead until very smooth, 3 to 4 minutes. Divide the dough in half. Wrap each half in plastic and set aside in a cool spot (other than the refrigerator) for at least 6 hours and best if a minimum of 12 hours.

To bake, position a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 300°F and grease your cooking sheets. Roll out half of your dough as thin as possible on a very lightly floured work surface. Thinner is better! Lift the dough frequently and add a bit more flour to the work surface and rolling pin as necessary to prevent sticking. Cut out the cookies using a round 2 ¼-inch cookie cutter. Transfer the cookies to your baking sheets using a spatula spacing them about 1 inch apart. Combine and roll out your scraps continuing to cut out cookies until all of the dough is used.

Bake one sheet at a time until the edges of the cookies are just turning dark, 6 to 8 minutes. Remember to rotate your cookie sheet half way through to insure even browning. Don't over bake or the cookies will have an unpleasant bitter taste. Remove the sheet to a cooling rack and let stand until the cookies firm up a bit. Transfer the cookies to racks to finish cooling.

I know not everyone likes coconut but this recipe is one we enjoyed when I was a child and out of nostalgia I had to include it. I hope you don't mind.

Coconut Macaroons

(About 2 dozen 1 ½-inch cookies)

Macaroons at one time were only based on almonds but the coconut version became popular many years ago particularly here in the United States. Stir together until well combined:

2/3 cup sweetened condensed milk

1 large egg white

1 ½ teaspoons vanilla

1/8 teaspoon salt

Then stir in until well blended:

3 ½ cups flaked or shredded sweetened coconut

Position a baking rack in the upper third of your oven and preheat the oven to 325°F. Cover the cookie sheets with parchment paper or well-greased aluminum foil.

Drop the dough by tablespoonfuls onto the sheets, spacing the cookies about 2 inches apart. Bake one sheet at a time until the cookies are nicely browned, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove the sheet to a rack and let stand until the cookies are completely cooled. Carefully peel the cookies from the paper or foil.

This is such a great time of year to enjoy nicely crafted wines and given our recipe selections this week I thought I might tell you about a great dessert wine that is ideal for finishing up a meal or as something to sip while chatting with friends. Auslese is made from grapes that are hand selected during the very end of the harvest season at the absolute peak of ripeness. Even people who have sworn to me that they do not enjoy wines fall in love with this one if they give it a try.

The 2001 Jakoby-Mathy Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Auslese comes to us from the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region of Germany and it is stunning in its brilliant green apple fruit concentration coupled with hints of focused tropical fruits like mango, papaya and super ripe citrus. Erich Jakoby is masterful in his winemaking and this one is a true treasure.

If you need help finding this one or have food questions let us know at 888-288-0668 or visit us online at www.winedog.com. Cheers.

