



signature sugar cookie dough

WITH VARIATIONS

WHAT CAN I SAY? I'm nostalgic at heart, which is why you'll find this cookie in so many projects throughout the book. You see, the Anise Seed Variation (p. 235) was my mom's invention—and the very same cookie that my sibs and I decorated so happily each and every Christmas. Look closely at the photo of me circa 1971 (p. 4), and you'll see me coddling one of these prized possessions! As one of my most delicate cookies, it's best used for 2-D projects and small or non-weight-bearing 3-D constructions.

Makes about 1 pound 6 ounces dough or 3 to 3½ dozen (2½-inch) round cookies

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, softened
- ⅓ cup (⅓ stick) shortening
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon whole milk
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract (or to taste, or per Variations, p. 235)

PREP TALK:

For easiest handling, the dough should be chilled about 3 hours before rolling and cutting. The dough can be frozen for 1 month or more with minimal loss of flavor if wrapped tightly in plastic and then foil.

For best eating, store baked cookies in airtight containers at room temperature and enjoy within 1 to 1½ weeks.

1. Combine the flour, baking powder, and salt in a small bowl. Set aside for use in Step 4.
2. Using an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter and shortening on medium speed until creamy. Gradually add the sugar and beat until light and

fluffy, about 1 minute. Do not over-beat, or your cookies will dome upon baking, making them more difficult to decorate later.

3. Whisk the egg, milk, and vanilla extract together in another bowl. Add additional flavorings to taste, or see

Variations (right). Slowly blend into the butter mixture, mixing thoroughly on low to medium speed until smooth. Scrape down the sides of the bowl, as needed, to ensure even mixing.

4. Turn the mixer to low speed and gradually add the reserved dry ingredients, mixing just until incorporated. Flatten the dough into a disk, wrap tightly in plastic, and refrigerate about 3 hours, or until firm enough to roll without sticking.

5. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 375°F. Line two cookie sheets with parchment paper (or silicone baking mats) and set aside.

6. Roll the dough on a lightly floured surface to a ⅛ to ⅜ inch thickness. (Note: It's best to roll these cookies no thicker than ⅜ inch in order to keep them their flattest for decorating.) Cut out assorted shapes with your favorite cookie cutters or the cutters or templates specified in the project you've chosen. Carefully transfer the cookies to the prepared cookie sheets with an offset spatula, leaving no less than ¾ inch between each cutout.

7. Baking time will vary considerably with cookie size and thickness. Bake until the cookies are lightly browned around their edges, about 8 to 10 minutes for 2½-inch round cookies or as specified in your project. Let particularly long or delicately shaped cookies cool 1 to 2 minutes on the cookie sheets before transferring to wire racks. Otherwise, immediately transfer to racks and cool completely before frosting and/or assembling with Royal Icing (p. 242) or storing.

VARIATIONS

{ Anise, courtesy of my mom }

Add ½ teaspoon anise extract along with the vanilla extract. Sprinkle each cookie sheet with 1½ teaspoons whole anise seed before placing and baking the cookies. The seeds will bake into the bottom of the cookies and impart a tasty crunch.

{ Orange-Clove }

Add ¾ teaspoon ground cloves to the dry ingredients. Increase the vanilla extract to 1 teaspoon and add 1½ teaspoons finely grated orange zest with the liquid ingredients.

{ Lemon-Cardamom }

Add ¼ teaspoon ground cardamom to the dry ingredients. Add 1½ teaspoons lemon extract and 2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest along with the vanilla extract.

{ Cinnamon }

Add 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon to the dry ingredients. Increase the vanilla extract to ¾ teaspoon. Note: The ground cinnamon will tint the dough pale brown.

royal icing

AKA “GLUE” WITH CONSISTENCY ADJUSTMENTS



I’VE SAID IT BEFORE AND I’LL SAY IT AGAIN: Royal Icing is—by far—my favorite cookie decorating medium! Even if I intend to use a relatively loose Royal Icing, I always start by mixing the icing to a very thick consistency using the egg white to powdered sugar ratio below. When mixed thick, the icing ends up with fewer air bubbles and coloring holds better, with less mottling (see p. TK). Also, the thicker the icing, the faster it dries, which makes this thick formulation ideal for securing decorations to cookie tops and sticking together compound cookies (p. 45) or larger 3-D structures. In short, it acts like “glue,” and that’s how I refer to it throughout the book. Most other decorating techniques require looser icing, which is easily achieved by thinning thick icing with water. See “Consistency Adjustments,” page 244, for details.

Makes about 2 pounds 4 ounces or 4½ to 5-plus cups; volume will vary with egg size, egg temperature, and beating time

- 2 pounds powdered sugar
- ½ teaspoon cream of tartar
- 5 large egg whites, cold (about 11 to 12 tablespoons pasteurized whites, or see “Substitutions,” p. 243)
- Flavoring of your choice, to taste (*Note:* Don’t skimp on the flavoring, or the icing can taste chalky.)
- Soft-gel food coloring (p. 14) of your choice (optional)

PREP TALK:

If tinted, the icing is best used the day it’s mixed. Otherwise, the icing can be made 1 to 2 days ahead and stored in the fridge. When ready to use, bring the icing to room temperature, stir vigorously to restore its original consistency (especially if any separation has occurred), and tint as desired. Once applied to cookies, the icing should remain at room temperature so it sets into a crunchy candy-like coating. *Important:* Unless you’re using the icing, always cover the surface flush with plastic wrap to prevent a crust from quickly forming.

1. Mix the powdered sugar and cream of tartar together in the bowl of an electric mixer. Stir in the egg whites by hand to moisten the sugar.
2. Fit the electric mixer with a whip attachment. To avoid a flurry of powdered sugar, beat the mixture on low speed just until the egg whites are evenly incorporated. Scrape down the sides of the bowl; then turn the mixer to its highest speed and continue to beat about 2 to 3 minutes. (The icing will lighten and thicken as you beat it. However, avoid beating too long; you’ll introduce excess air bubbles, which are tough to remove and interfere with smooth top-coating.) When done, the icing should be bright white, glossy, and very thick—and at what I call “glue” consistency. At this consistency, the icing will cling to a spoon (held upside down) indefinitely without falling off. See “Visual Cue #1,” right.
3. Beat in flavoring (always a must!) and/or coloring, as desired. Mix well before using or store, covered flush with plastic wrap, as instructed in “Prep Talk.”



Visual Cue #1: Royal Icing of “glue” consistency clings to a spoon indefinitely!

Substitutions: Raw Egg Whites

Some bakers steer clear of Royal Icing and Italian Buttercream (p. 257) because of the risks of salmonella and other bacterial poisoning associated with raw egg whites. But there’s no reason to let fear get in the way of superior decorating! These risks can be substantially reduced by substituting about 2 to 3 tablespoons pasteurized egg whites for each large white in my recipes. Pasteurized whites can be found in the refrigerated section of most grocery stores.

Alternatively, meringue powder (a mixture of dehydrated whites and often sugar, vegetable gum, and preservatives)

can be combined with water. About 2 teaspoons meringue powder plus 2 tablespoons water is equivalent to 1 large egg white. However, there are some downsides to meringue powder: (1) it’s often harder to find than pasteurized whites; (2) you must take extra care to completely dissolve it with warm water, or the resulting icing will be gritty; and (3) because of its additives, it results in much sweeter, often stiffer icings than those made with raw eggs or pasteurized whites.

Consistency Adjustments, by Decorating Technique

In cookie decorating, icing consistency is king! Your success or failure, or pleasure or frustration, with each of my “15 Bottom-to-Top Decorating Techniques” (p. 27) is likely to be determined by one thing: whether your icing is the right consistency. To set you on the path to success, I’ve compiled here the recommended consistency adjustments for each of my major decorating techniques and ordered them from thickest to thinnest consistency.

Note: These consistency adjustments are *approximate guidelines for 1 cup of untinted, unflavored Royal Icing* made with raw egg whites and freshly mixed to thick “glue” consistency. The addition of food coloring or flavoring, beating time, humidity, prior refrigeration, and variations in egg size can all affect the final consistency of your icing. Royal Icing made with pasteurized whites or hydrated meringue powder (per “Substitutions,” p. 243) generally starts out a bit thicker and may require more loosening to achieve the ideal consistency for each technique.

If after making these adjustments, you think your icing is too thin or too thick for your application, don’t worry. The icing consistency can be adjusted at any stage of the decorating process simply by adding powdered sugar to thicken, or water to thin. Just be sure to sift powdered sugar before adding, as sugar clumps can be hard to break up and will block small holes in pastry bags and cones. Water should always be stirred in, versus beaten in with an electric mixer, to avoid introducing excess air bubbles.

For outlining: Add about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoons water per 1 cup icing “glue.” For crisp, well-defined outlines, start with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon water. If the icing is too thick to easily pipe through the desired hole in your parchment pastry cone (or tip in your pastry bag), gradually add more water. See “Visual Cue #2,” right, for more details.

For stenciling: Generally, $\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons water per 1 cup icing “glue” works best, though the exact quantity will vary with the size and complexity of your stencil and the other variables noted earlier. The icing must be thin enough to spread easily into the stencil openings without leaving peaks or tracks when the spatula is lifted. At the same time, it must be sufficiently thick



Visual Cue #2: Royal Icing of outlining consistency is thick and stretchy and drops off a spoon in relatively large blobs.

to keep from creeping under the stencil into areas where it’s not wanted. For stencils with delicate, closely spaced openings (such as the one pictured right in “Beginner vs. Advanced Stencil,” p. 37), it’s best to start on the thicker end of this spectrum to avoid icing creep and blurring of the pattern. Stencils with more space ($\frac{1}{8}$ inch or more) between openings (pictured left, p. 37) are less sensitive to icing creep and, therefore, icing consistency. Lastly, large stencils (greater than about 2 inches across) typically require icing on the thinner end of this spectrum so that they can be smoothly covered without leaving tracks.

For marbling: Generally, marbling begins with the application of top-coating icing (below) to a cookie; then contrasting icings of marbling consistency are immediately piped on top. For the marbling icings, I like to use icing that is slightly thicker than the one used for top-coating, i.e., mixed in the ratio of about $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{3}$ teaspoons water per 1 cup icing “glue.” A thinner consistency will marble smoothly, but as you add more water, you’re more likely to experience bleeding of colors as the icing dries. Conversely, thicker marbling icings will marble less smoothly;

that is, the trussing needle or toothpick (used to marble the colors) may actually break the marbling icing rather than leave behind long, graceful tracks.

For top-coating: Ideal top-coating consistency usually varies from about $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons water per 1 cup icing “glue,” depending on cookie size. To avoid icing run-off on cookies under 2 inches, start on the lower end of this spectrum. Gradually increase to $2\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons water, as needed, to improve spread-ability on larger cookies. You can also use what I’ve dubbed “the 15-second rule” to quickly gauge whether icing is at top-coating consistency for an average (2- to 3-inch) cookie. See “Visual Cue #3,” below, for details.



Visual Cue #3: Royal Icing of top-coating consistency flows slowly off a spoon. Tracks largely disappear into the bulk of the icing in about 15 seconds.

For beadwork: About 2 to 3 teaspoons per 1 cup icing “glue” works best, though expect some variability with the factors noted on page 34. At the proper consistency, a smooth, well rounded dot should form when the icing is piped through a small ($\frac{1}{16}$ -inch or more) hole in a parchment pastry cone. If the icing forms a peak, it is too thick. Conversely, if it spreads a great deal, it is too loose.

For flooding: Ideal flooding consistency varies widely with cookie size and also icing color. I generally add anywhere from 2 to 3 or more teaspoons water per 1 cup icing “glue.” However, the goal should be to keep the icing as thick as possible, yet still flowing freely enough to prevent tracks. Why? Again, the thinner the icing, the greater the likelihood of colors bleeding, especially if the flooding color is much darker (or lighter) than the adjacent outlining color. (As a rule of thumb, 2 teaspoons should be plenty for cookies under 2 inches; only very large cookies, in excess of 5 to 6 inches, will require 3 or more teaspoons to ensure smooth spreading.) See “Visual Cue #4,” below.



Visual Cue #4: Royal Icing of flooding consistency flows quickly off a spoon. Tracks largely disappear into the bulk of the icing in 10 seconds or less.

For dipping: Again, ideal dipping consistency varies with cookie size and also the type of dipping, i.e., either Nose-Dive Dipping (p. 32) or Roundabout Dipping (p. 34). I generally add anywhere from 2 to 4 teaspoons of water per 1 cup icing “glue”—lesser amounts for Roundabout Dipping or Nose-Dive Dipping of small (2-inch or less) cookies, and larger amounts for Nose-Dive Dipping of larger cookies, such as the egg whites in Breakfast in Bed (p. 95).