

HOW TO TUCK IN YOUR GARDEN BEDS FOR WINTER, p. 51



Winter 2014

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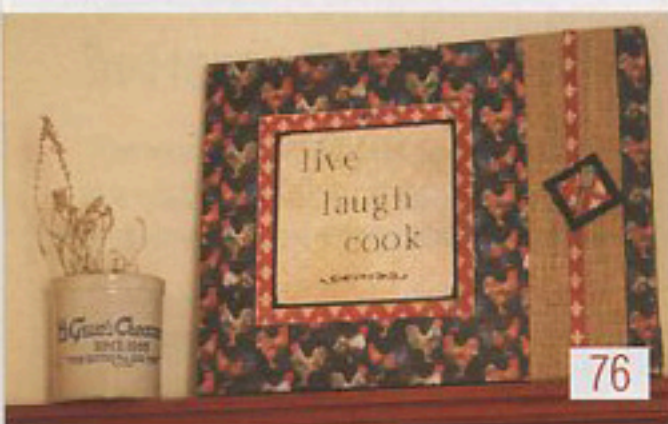
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# Over-the-Top Cookie Swap

**This holiday season, deck your kitchen table with these tasty herbal cookie recipes your family and friends will love.**

By Julia M. Usher

For most of us, the holidays are all about giving back, about sharing the things we love to do, or make, with those who have supported us throughout the year. As a pastry chef and event designer, my favorite gifts to give are parties that put a high priority on delicious food.

Whether you're throwing an elaborate holiday get-together or simply baking up tins of cookies for friends and neighbors, I hope these recipes inspire you. For our little gathering, the centerpiece was a completely edible composition of Anise-Scented Sugar Cookie trees – star-shaped cookies stacked up tall on cut-glass candlesticks – surrounded by a frosty landscape of confectioner's sugar, rock candy and peppermint-infused truffles swathed in white chocolate. We threaded frosted gingerbread angels and stars with satin ribbon and hung them on the crystal chandelier for a hint of heaven above the forest. Pastry blenders with recipe cards and real gingerbread boxes filled with cookies were the icing on this luscious treat.



If these party trappings seem too elaborate for the hostess in the usual holiday rush, here's my advice: First, keep the guest list to a minimum. A tight-knit group always cultivates a feeling of intimacy, but it also frees the hostess to focus on personal touches that will leave each guest feeling special. Second, join forces when you can. I asked a friend who is an interior designer and the owner of a

home-furnishings boutique to handle the decorating details at my party, thus allowing me to stay focused on what I know best. And talk about holiday cheer – there's no better way to share the joy of the season than party planning with a good friend.

## ANISE-SCENTED SUGAR COOKIES

In lieu of evergreens or tinsel, deck



Lavender Shortbread

2 weeks ahead. They will stay their crispest if stored at room temperature in airtight containers. If you plan to dip and decorate them, do it just before serving. Silver dragées should not be refrigerated or they will lose their sheen and possibly dissolve.

### LAVENDER SHORTBREAD

These cookies have great staying power, which is why I love to have them on hand for the holidays. If stored properly – in airtight containers at room temperature – they will stay fresh for 1 to 2 weeks. Yields about 25 cookies.

- ½ cup blanched whole almonds
- 3 tablespoons dried lavender flowers
- 2 cups bleached all-purpose flour, divided
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, softened
- ¼ cup plus 2 to 3 tablespoons granulated sugar, divided

- ¼ cup confectioner's sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 In a food processor fitted with a metal blade, grind the almonds, lavender flowers and 2 tablespoons flour until the nuts are finely textured, but not pasty.

2 Into a bowl, sift together the remaining flour and salt. Stir into ground nut mixture; set aside.

3 In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, cream the butter, ¼ cup granulated sugar and confectioner's sugar until light and fluffy. Turn mixer to low speed, and gradually add flour-nut mixture, blending until just combined. Stir in vanilla extract.

4 Turn dough out and flatten into a disk; wrap tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 3 hours, or until very firm.

5 Place a rack in center of oven and preheat oven to 300 F. Line two 15-by-

10-inch cookie sheets with parchment paper and set aside.

6 On a lightly floured surface, roll dough out to ¼ inch thickness. Cut out assorted shapes using cookie cutters. Carefully transfer cookies to prepared cookie sheets, spacing them about 1 inch apart. Sprinkle tops evenly with remaining sugar.

7 Bake for about 30 minutes, or until shortbread is firm to the touch and lightly browned on the bottom. Immediately transfer to cooling racks and cool completely before storing.

**NOTE:** If desired, you can add a sparkly border by painting cookie edges with Royal Icing (you'll need about ¼ cup; see recipe on Page 55) using a small craft brush, then immediately rolling the edges in silver dragées (you'll need between ¼ and ½ cup), which have been placed in a shallow bowl. Set cookies on parchment-lined cookie sheets to dry icing before moving and storing them. 🍪

## Rosemary-Almond Biscotti



### ROSEMARY-ALMOND BISCOTTI

Dress these biscotti by dipping them in chocolate and crowning them with a dainty sprig of rosemary or a single silver dragée. If you're short on time, don't fret. These cookies are perfectly delicious in their original attire as well. Yields about 25 biscotti (4½ inches by 1 inch).

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 2½ cups bleached all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup blanched slivered almonds (1½ ounces), toasted, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh rosemary leaves
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 pounds premium semisweet or white chocolate, tempered, optional

Silver dragées (sugar beads) or tiny rosemary sprigs, optional

1 Place rack in center of oven and preheat oven to 325 F. Line two 15-by-10-inch cookie sheets with parchment paper and set aside.

2 In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, cream butter until smooth. Gradually add sugar, and beat until mixture is light and fluffy, about 1 to 2 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition.

3 Into another bowl, sift together flour, baking powder and salt; stir into butter-sugar mixture, blending only until dry ingredients are just incorporated. Stir in chopped almonds, rosemary and vanilla.

4 On a lightly floured surface, shape dough into 2 rectangular logs, 8-by-3-by-¾-inch. Place 1 log in the center of each cookie sheet and bake until logs are slightly golden around

the edges, about 30 to 35 minutes. Immediately slide logs onto a cutting board and slice into ¾-inch-thick cross sections. It's important that you do not let logs cool more than a few minutes or they will become difficult to cut without cracking.

5 Place slices, cut side down, on cookie sheets and return to oven to bake until light brown and crisp, another 10 to 15 minutes. Immediately transfer biscotti to cooling racks and allow to cool completely before dipping in chocolate or storing.

6 If desired, decorate the cookies by dipping one end of each biscotti into tempered chocolate. Place dipped biscotti on parchment-lined cookie sheets and place in the refrigerator to quickly set the chocolate. Remove biscotti from refrigerator and affix a tiny rosemary sprig or a single dragée to each cookie using a small drop of melted chocolate.

**NOTE:** Biscotti can be made 1 to