

These delectable homemade gems,
presented in gaily decorated jars, bags,
and boxes, make thoughtful gifts. Just
be sure to save some for yourself!

HOLIDAY cookies



RECIPES AND FOOD STYLING BY JULIA M. USHER COOKIE CONTAINERS DESIGNED BY TRENNA TRAVIS LANGE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BORELLA & COMPANY



1⅓ cups pecans (about 4 ounces),
toasted and finely chopped

1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon

¾ teaspoon ground cloves

Meringue Coating

4 large egg whites, cold

¼ teaspoon cream of tartar

1 cup superfine sugar

Less than ½ teaspoon silver dragées
(optional)

4 ounces Royal Icing (page 90) or
premium semisweet melted
chocolate (optional)

1. Line two 15- x 10-inch cookie sheets
with parchment paper and set aside.

2. Position a rack in the center of the
oven and preheat the oven to 225°.

3. Prepare the date filling: Place the
chopped dates, orange zest, candied orange

rind, juice, and liqueur in a stainless-steel
or non-reactive saucepan. Cook over
medium-low heat, stirring regularly, until
the dates have softened and all of the
liquid has been absorbed, about 10 min-
utes. Remove from the heat. Stir in the
chopped pecans and ground spices and
cool the mixture completely before shap-
ing. Shape into 1¼-inch ball, and set on
the prepared cookie sheets until ready to
coat with the meringue.

4. Make the meringue: Place the cold
egg whites and cream of tartar in the bowl
of an electric mixer fitted with a whip
attachment. Beat the whites on low speed
until frothy. Gradually add the superfine
sugar, increasing the mixer to high speed.
Continue to whip the whites until they
form stiff, glossy peaks and the sugar is

completely dissolved, about 10 minutes.
Working quickly so the meringue does
not deflate, insert a toothpick into each
ball. Dip each ball in the meringue, mak-
ing sure to coat it completely to conceal
the filling. Return the coated balls to the
prepared cookie sheets and remove the
toothpicks, using another toothpick to
keep the balls from shifting. If desired,
dab the meringue with the tip of a paring
knife to create small tufts in the coating.
5. Bake until puffy and dry to the touch,
about 2 hours. Immediately transfer the
cookies to racks and let cool completely. To
prevent the meringue from getting sticky,
seal the cookies as soon as they are cool in
airtight containers. Store at room tempera-
ture. Should the meringue get soft despite
these precautions, the cookies can always ►

be re-dried in a 225° oven until they no longer feel tacky. (Note: The cookies are delicious even when the meringue is soft, but they are easier to handle and package when dry.) Right before serving or packaging, affix a small silver dragée on top of each cookie with a drop of Royal Icing or melted chocolate, as desired.



OLD-FASHIONED ROLLED SUGAR COOKIES

(with cardamom spice variation)

MAKES 3 DOZEN 3- TO 4-INCH COOKIES

These versatile cookies are always in fashion. Decked out with cardamom, royal icing accents, and sugar bead bling, they are nothing short of glamorous in our Hanukkah purses or Christmas letter box (page 88). And rest assured, if you leave them simply coated or even un-iced, they will still draw your guests' undivided attention.

- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1½ sticks (¾ cup) unsalted butter, softened
- ⅔ cup shortening
- 1½ cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Decoration (optional)

- 1-2 batches Royal Icing (recipe follows)
- A few sugar beads (dragées) of various sizes

1. Make the dough: Stir the flour, baking powder, and salt together in a small bowl. Set aside. Using an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter and shortening until just combined. Gradually add the sugar and beat until light and fluffy, about 1-2 minutes. Whisk the eggs, milk, and vanilla extract together in another bowl. Slowly add the liquid to the creamed butter and sugar and blend thoroughly. Add the reserved dry ingredients, stirring just to combine. Flatten the dough into two disks, wrap tightly in plastic, and chill until quite firm, at least 3 hours.

2. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 375°. Line two

or more 15- x 10-inch cookie sheets with parchment paper and set aside.

3. Working with one disk at a time, roll the dough on a lightly floured surface to a ¼-inch thickness. Cut out assorted holiday shapes with your favorite cookie cutters. Carefully transfer the cookies with an off-set spatula to the prepared cookie sheets, leaving about a ½ inch between each cut-out. Bake for 8-12 minutes, or until the cookies are light brown around their edges. Immediately turn the cookies onto racks and let them cool completely before frosting with Royal Icing (recipe follows) or storing. For maximum flavor, eat the cookies within a few days. However, they will hold for 1 or more weeks—even after they're iced—if sealed in airtight containers and stored at room temperature.

4. Decorate: Paint the cookie surfaces with a loose formulation of Royal Icing. Allow the topcoat to fully set, about 1 hour, before applying any additional icing decorations. For finer details such as outlines and scrollwork, or to apply relatively

heavy objects like sugar beads, use a thicker formulation of Royal Icing piped with a parchment cone or a pastry bag fitted with a #2 or #3 round tip.

Cardamom Spice Variation

Add 1 teaspoon ground cardamom along with the dry ingredients in Step 1, and proceed as directed.

ROYAL ICING

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS, ENOUGH TO TOP COAT 2 TO 3 DOZEN COOKIES

Use this thick formulation as edible glue for adhering sugar beads to cookies or for piping delicate lines, scrollwork, or other cookie-top embellishments. Alternatively, thin it with water, add a drop of food coloring or flavoring, and then spread it on rolled cookies for an icy, smooth topcoat.

- 1 pound box confectioners' sugar
- ¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
- 2-3 large egg whites (or 4-6 teaspoons dried egg whites reconstituted with 4-6 tablespoons water)
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract ►

