

The Sugar on Top:

A Holiday Cookie Decorating Primer

*Text and styling by Julia M. Usher
Photos by Karen Forsythe*

Whether you typically bake in small batches for friends and family or en masse for a bakery or other food service operation, visions of sugar cookies are no doubt dancing in your head. They've certainly got me in a spin. Each holiday season, I find myself feverishly gathering cookie decorating trinkets – dragées, sanding sugar, luster dust, you name it – and plumbing my creative reserves for new and different cookie designs. It's hard to meet the onslaught of cookie requests in November and December, but it's even harder to do so with originality year after year.

When my material runs dry, I always go back to a short list of eleven core decorating techniques (sidebar,

p. 37) and a basic Royal Icing recipe (p. 40). Often, all it takes are a few icing adjustments (sidebar, p. 40) and a little mixing and matching of techniques – marbling applied with sanding, or outlining with stenciling, for instance – to create striking and unique results.

I hope you enjoy my gift to you this season – this simple, no-fail cookie decorating primer. May it clear your head and open your eyes to the many wonderful possibilities of cookie decorating!

Adapted from *Cookie Swap: Creative Treats to Share Throughout the Year* by Julia M. Usher



Decked for the Season

A mixture of cookie decorating techniques makes this holiday cookie collection especially eye-catching.





E.



F.



G.

A. Star Struck (*top-coating, outlining, beadwork*). These boldly decorated stars were first top-coated with either white or green Royal Icing. Center “spokes” and borders were then applied using the outlining technique; dots with the beadwork technique.

B. All that Glitters is Gold (*dusting*). This star shimmers as light dances off iridescent gold powder dusted on top.

C. Sock It To ‘Em (*marbling, papering, sanding*). The marbling technique (bodies of left and right stockings) packs a powerful punch through its sheer versatility. Simply by altering the background icing color (pink on left; red on right), very different looks can be achieved. The plaid accents on the center stocking are wafer paper; the tops of the two stockings to the right have been fluffed up with white nonpareils using the sanding technique.

D. Tree Trimming 101 (*outlining, painting, sanding, appliqué work*). On the Christmas tree to the right, the garland was first drawn using a relatively thick, dark green Royal Icing and the outlining technique. After drying completely, the tiny swags were painted with gold luster dust extended with clear extract. On the tree to the left, the garland was drawn with the same icing, but sanded with mini (1 mm) gold dragées while the icing was still wet. The treetop stars are fondant cutouts - examples of appliqué work - painted with gold luster dust.

E. Marbling, More Ways! (*marbling, beadwork, appliqué work*). For the marbled tree “branches” and “holly leaves” on the wreath, only a single color (dark green) was applied to the background icing, as compared to the four colors in the stockings above. The result: a simpler marbling effect. Appliqué work shows up again in the treetop stars; beadwork in the red “ornaments” and “holly berries”.

F. Two Hand-y Techniques (*flooding, papering*). To create defined angular shapes such as the zigzag pattern on the right mitten, flooding is usually the best way to go. Simply direct a relatively loose Royal Icing into outlined boundaries with a parchment pastry cone. Papering (plaid trim on left mitten) is a great method for adding lavish detail fast. Just cut the desired shape from a sheet of wafer paper (plaid paper under plate) and paste as described on p. 37.

G. Stencil-icous (*top-coating, stenciling, beadwork*). Evocative of the flocked tablecloth on which they sit, these cookies were first top-coated with deep red Royal Icing; then stenciled in a high-contrast white after the red icing had dried. The green dots are examples of beadwork, which requires a relatively loose Royal Icing to prevent “peaks” from forming.