

## [Brandywine Table]

# Holiday Cookies

ADD SOME NEW FAVORITES  
TO YOUR TABLE THIS YEAR.

Laura Muzzi Brennan & *County Lines* Staff



**E**VERYONE LOVES COOKIES. Some stats say 7 billion are enjoyed each year in the U.S., with about half of those goodies coming from home bakers. And with the spokesperson for this tasty treat being *Sesame Street*'s beloved Cookie Monster, what's not to love?

Thinking on a somewhat smaller scale, we've found that on average, Americans eat about 300 cookies a year. And it's likely that around half get gobbled down when the winter holidays are in full swing. After all, who can resist a homemade treat tucked into a brightly colored box and delivered by one who wishes you well?

So that's 300 reasons (or 7 billion) why we decided to share our Holiday Cookie column again this year—updated with some new contributions. We've devoted "Brandywine Table" to holiday cookies and the folks who



mix the dough and pipe the icing—Santa's other helpers.

Rounding out the roster of bakers are members of our *County Lines* staff. They've pulled out battered old recipe boxes and pulled up their computer folders and Evernote files to find their favorites—the special ones that consistently garner accolades at family gatherings and holiday parties.

Now what to do when your id begs you to try every cookie recipe but your superego intervenes with a reality check?

Get in touch with your inner Martha Stewart: host a cookie exchange. That's an ideal way to celebrate the season with friends while adding variety to your holiday cookie supply. See the sidebar for tips about how to host a holiday cookie swap.

This December let Holiday Cookies take the cake!



## Kiffllets

*A lifetime ago, when I was a high school English teacher, I used to get these every Christmas from one of my students. Before she went to college, she gave me the recipe. After an exhaustive search for the history of these buttery cookies, I can only conclude that they're a simple version of the traditional Hungarian kiffle, a pastry-like cookie filled with nuts and fruit.*

- 1 lb. butter (must be butter!) room temp.
- ½ C. granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 4 C. flour
- 1 C. confectioners' sugar for dredging.

Preheat oven to 350°. With an electric mixer, cream butter with sugar and vanilla. With your hands, mix in flour. Dough should be smooth, not sticky or crumbly. If dough is too soft, add a little more flour.

By hand, form into crescents, about 1 to 1½ inches long.

Bake for 10 minutes. Cookies are done when they are firm to the touch (don't worry if they brown slightly on the bottom).

As soon as cookies have cooled enough for you to touch them, dredge each by hand in confectioners' sugar. The cookies should be hot so the sugar coats them, but if the first one crumbles, wait a few minutes and try again.

Makes 80 cookies.

## Classic Sugar Cookies

*Here's our Betty Crocker recipe that Business Manager Debbie French has used and enjoyed for years. She's a fan of the Butterscotch variation, too.*

- ¾ C. shortening (part butter or margarine softened)
- 1 C. sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp. vanilla or ½ tsp. lemon extract
- 2½ C. flour (not self-rising flour)
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. salt



## Cookie Swap

Between shopping, decorating and wrapping presents, holiday baking may get left on the back-burner. The solution? Host a cookie swap—like a potluck, but guests leave with dozens of different kinds of tasty cookies. Here are tips for before, during and after a very merry cookie party.

### Pre-party

- Holiday schedules get packed so send invites three weeks to a month beforehand.
- Have guests bring a dozen cookies for every guest. A half dozen works if the party is over ten.
- Coordinate who brings what ahead of time, so everyone gets a yummy assortment.
- Thick, sturdy cookies are ideal, so they survive the car ride home. Think gingerbread, snickerdoodles, macaroons.

### At the Party

- Display cookies on festive platters, plates and cake stands. Use place cards to label each variety and who baked them.
- Set up a packaging station with paper bakery boxes, ribbon and other trimmings.
- Make it a contest! Have guests vote on their favorite—winner takes home extra cookies or a bottle of bubbly!

### Post-Party

- Have guests email their recipe afterward. Compile them and email to all the guests. Now they'll have a holiday baking cookbook for next season.

Preheat oven to 400°. Mix together shortening, sugar, eggs and vanilla. Mix in dry ingredients—flour, baking powder and salt.

Cover the dough and chill in the fridge for at least an hour.

Prepare a lightly-floured, cloth-covered board. Roll out the dough to about ⅛-inch thickness. Use cookie cutters to cut dough into desired shapes. Place on an ungreased baking sheet and bake for 6 to 8 minutes (should be very light brown).

Makes about 4 dozen cookies.

*Hints: To avoid crumbling and breakage, cut with rounded edges on the cookie cutters, rather than sharp edges.*

*To mail: wrap cookies back to back or cut them only slightly smaller in circumference than a soup or fruit juice can. Then stack baked cookies, wrap and place in can to mail.*

*Butterscotch Variation:* Use brown sugar instead of white sugar, plus 1 cup of chopped black walnuts.

## Chocolate Truffles

*Associate Editor, Marci Tomassone, contributed to this recipe, which she calls "an absolutely wonderful addition to the cookie tray." Whatever you don't give away will keep in the fridge for weeks.*

- ½ lb. good quality semi-sweet chocolate



½ lb. good quality bittersweet chocolate  
 1 C. heavy cream  
 2 Tb. orange flavored liqueur (optional)  
 1 Tb. prepared coffee  
 ½ to 1 tsp. good vanilla extract  
 Confectioners' sugar  
 Cocoa powder



Thinly slice or shave chocolate into heat-proof bowl.

In a small saucepan, heat heavy cream until it just barely comes to a boil. Turn off and let it stand for 30 seconds. Pour through a sieve (or cheesecloth) into the chocolate shavings and, using a wire whisk, mix well until chocolate is melted.

Add coffee, vanilla and, if you like, the liqueur.

Let sit at room temperature for an hour. The mixture will start to harden enough to work with. Form balls and put on parchment-lined baking sheet. (I use a melon baller to scoop, then quickly roll into a ball. Don't handle for too long.)

Refrigerate for 1 hour. Roll in confectioner's sugar or cocoa powder.

Makes about 60.

### Snickerdoodles

*Also from Associate Editor, Marci Tomassone. No one really knows where the cookie got its name but theories abound. The Joy of Cooking guesses it evolved from the German word for "snail dumpling" and another source says it comes from New England where cookies were often tagged with whimsical names.*

2¾ C. all-purpose flour  
 1 tsp. baking soda  
 ½ tp. salt  
 ½ C. shortening  
 8 Tb. (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened  
 1½ C. plus 3 Tb. sugar  
 2 large eggs  
 1 Tb. ground cinnamon

Sift flour, baking soda and salt into a bowl and set aside.

Beat together shortening and butter (hand or standing mixer).

## A Sweet Bite of History

Cookies were a happy accident. Centuries ago, bakers tested the heat of their oven by dropping a spoonful of cake batter onto the cooking surface. Those little drops, especially when sugar was added, turned out to be quite tasty. Now people of almost every culture have a cookie they call their own.

Dutch immigrants introduced the cookie to America in the 18th century. "Cookie" derives from the Dutch word "koekje," meaning little cake.

Betty's Crocker's *Cooky Book*, originally published in 1963, remains one of America's favorite cookbooks. When it went out of print, cookie lovers bombarded General Mills with so many requests that the book was re-released in 2002.

A *Reader's Digest* survey a few years ago found that chocolate chip and sugar cookies were America's two most beloved holiday cookies. Third place winners varied by state. In the *County Lines* territories of Pennsylvania and Delaware, the pizelle—the traditional Italian waffle cookie—took the bronze.

And Cookie Monster fans may be interested to know that the chocolate chip cookie is not his favorite. Instead, Cookie's fave is actually a sugar cookie, with a recipe published in the 1970's *Bird Book*.



Add 1½ cups sugar and continue beating until light and fluffy (5–7 minutes).

Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add flour mixture, blend until smooth.

Mix the 3 tablespoons sugar with cinnamon in a small bowl. Roll dough, by hand, into 1½-inch balls. Roll the balls in cinnamon sugar. Flatten balls into 1½-inch thick rounds, and space evenly on unlined cookie sheets.

Bake until light brown, but still moist in the center, 10–12 minutes. Cool on a rack. Makes about 5 dozen cookies.

### Coco Locos

*These cookies are a grab-bag of flavors. The recipe originally appeared in Bon Appétit. I've revised the directions to make the recipe easier to follow.*

1/2 lb. butter, softened  
2/3 C. light brown sugar, packed  
2/3 C. granulated sugar  
1 large egg  
1 tsp. vanilla  
1 3/4 C. all-purpose flour  
1/2 tsp. baking soda  
1/4 tsp. salt  
1/2 lb. chocolate, cut into 1/2-inch pieces  
1 1/2 C. old-fashioned rolled oats  
1 C. sweetened grated coconut  
1/2 C. chopped pecans



Preheat oven to 375°. Using an electric mixer, cream butter with sugars until fluffy. Beat in egg and vanilla.

Gradually mix in flour, baking soda and salt. By hand, stir chocolate, oats, coconut and pecans.

Drop rounded tablespoons of dough on a cookie sheet. Bake for 12 minutes until cookies are golden. Cool on a rack.

Makes 3 dozen. ♦

*Laura traces her love of all things culinary to the first time she leafed through her mother's Betty Crocker's Cooky Book—which still occupies a place of honor among her 700+ cookbooks. A passionate supporter of local food, she co-founded a farmers market, judges area food contests, and anticipates restaurant openings with the excitement most people reserve for winning a Mega Millions jackpot.*



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