Our Ultimate Guide to Holiday Cookies
One Master Recipe, 30 Ways

Our versatile recipe lends itself to multiple decorations, flavorings, mix-ins, and shapes. Pick and mix your favorites, then sprinkle, glaze, and decorate!

Basic Vanilla Cookie Dough

**ACTIVE/TOTAL TIME: 15 MIN.**
**MAKES: VARIES DEPENDING ON METHOD**

- 3 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- ¾ teaspoon baking powder (omit if making thumbprints, ball cookies, or spritz cookies)
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 sticks salted butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 large egg
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

1. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl. Beat butter and sugar with a mixer on medium-high speed until pale and fluffy. Beat in egg and vanilla. Reduce speed to low. Add flour mixture, and beat until combined. For tinted cookies, add drops of gel–paste food coloring once the flour is incorporated. Dough can be refrigerated overnight or frozen for up to 1 month. Proceed with one of the methods below.

| VARIATIONS |

**SPICE COOKIE DOUGH:** Add ½ teaspoons ground cinnamon, ¼ teaspoon ground ginger, ¼ teaspoon ground allspice, and ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper when you add the flour mixture.

**CHOCOLATE COOKIE DOUGH:** Replace ½ cup flour with ½ cup Dutch-process cocoa powder.

**CITRUS COOKIE DOUGH:** Replace vanilla extract with 1 teaspoon finely grated citrus zest and 1 tablespoon fresh citrus juice.

Essential Tools

For **Cutout Cookies:** a rolling pin, cookie cutters, and a pastry tip

For **Glazed Spritz Cookies:** a cookie press

For **Icebox Cookies:** a bread knife

For **Thumbprints and Ball Cookies:** no special equipment necessary -- just two hands!
METHOD #1
Roll, press, bake, fill -- or simply roll and bake

Thumbprints and Ball Cookies

YIELD: MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN (VARIES DEPENDING ON SHAPES)

1. APRICOT THUMBPRINTS: 1 batch Vanilla Dough + ¼ cup chopped pistachios (optional) + ½ cup apricot jam

2. RASPBERRY THUMBPRINTS: 1 batch Chocolate or Vanilla Dough + ¼ cup chopped pistachios or sanding sugar (optional) + ½ cup raspberry jam

3. GANACHE THUMBPRINTS: 1 batch Chocolate Dough (or ½ batch Chocolate Dough + ½ batch Vanilla Dough, marbled; see below) + ¼ cup crushed peppermints + 1 batch Ganache (see below)

4. DRIED FRUIT THUMBPRINTS: ½ batch Chocolate Dough + ½ batch Vanilla Dough, marbled + 1 cup chopped dried fruit mixed with 1 tablespoon fruit jam

5. CANDIED ORANGE PEEL THUMBPRINTS: 1 batch Chocolate Dough (or ½ batch Chocolate Dough + ½ batch Vanilla Dough, marbled) + 1 cup chopped candied orange peel

6. CHOCOLATE-DIPPED BALL COOKIES: 1 batch Chocolate Dough + 1½ cups melted chocolate (12 ounces) + ¼ cup crushed peppermints (dip cooled cookies in melted chocolate; sprinkle with candies, and let set in refrigerator)

7. MARBLEIZED BALL COOKIES: ½ batch Chocolate Dough + ½ batch Vanilla Dough, marbled + ½ cup sanding sugar (optional)

8. PEPPERMINT BALL COOKIES: 1 batch Chocolate Dough + 1 cup crushed peppermints

MARBLEIZING TECHNIQUE
Roll out a ½-inch-thick rope of Chocolate Dough. Roll out a ½-inch-thick rope of Vanilla Dough. Pinch off a ¾-inch piece from each rope. Roll together into 1 ball.

1. Roll dough into 1-inch balls, then roll in finely chopped nuts, crushed candies, or sanding sugar, if using. Arrange on parchment-lined baking sheets, spacing each 1 inch apart.

2. For thumbprints: Press a well into the center of each using your finger. Refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes. Bake at 350° for 7 minutes. Remove from oven, and press well again with handle end of a wooden spoon. Bake until firm, 7 to 9 minutes more. Let cool completely. Spoon filling into thumbprints.

For ball cookies: Refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes. Bake at 350° until firm, 14 to 16 minutes. Let cool completely.

Ganache

YIELD: 1½ CUPS (ENOUGH TO FILL 5 DOZEN THUMBPRINTS)

1. cup heavy cream, gently simmered
8. ounces chopped bittersweet chocolate

1. Pour cream over chocolate; let stand for 5 minutes. Stir until smooth. Let stand until mixture is spoonable, about 15 minutes.
METHOD #2
Mix in, refrigerate, slice, bake

Shaped Icebox Cookies

YIELD: MAKES ABOUT 10 DOZEN

9  ALMOND-CHERRY COINS: 1 batch Vanilla Dough + ¼ cup each chopped toasted blanched almonds and dried cherries + ½ cup sanding sugar (for rolling)

10  APRICOT-PISTACHIO TRIANGLES: 1 batch Vanilla Dough + ¼ cup each chopped dried apricots and pistachios

11  ALMOND AND CANDIED ORANGE ZEST BARS: 1 batch Citrus Dough + 1 cup chopped toasted blanched almonds + ½ cup chopped candied orange peel

12  WHITE CHOCOLATE, HAZELNUT, AND CHERRY TRIANGLES: 1 batch Chocolate Dough + ¼ cup each chopped white chocolate, toasted hazelnuts, and dried cherries

13  PAPAYA, MACADAMIA, AND COCONUT TRIANGLES: 1 batch Citrus Dough + ½ cup each chopped dried papaya, macadamia nuts, and shredded sweetened coconut

14  CRANBERRY-ORANGE COINS: 1 batch Spice Dough + 1 cup chopped dried cranberries + ¼ cup chopped candied orange peel

15  CHOCOLATE, WALNUT, AND CRANBERRY COINS: 1 batch Vanilla Dough + ¼ cup each chopped semisweet chocolate, toasted walnuts, and dried cranberries + 1½ cups ground toasted walnuts (for rolling)

16  CANDIED-FRUIT SQUARES: 1 batch Vanilla Dough + ¼ cup each chopped candied citrus and glacéed cherries

17  ALMOND AND GINGER BARS: 1 batch Spice Dough + 1 cup chopped toasted blanched almonds + ½ cup chopped candied ginger

1. Shape dough into 2 disks. Wrap each in plastic wrap. Refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour. Roll out 1 disk on a lightly floured piece of parchment ¼ to ½ inch thick. Repeat with remaining disk. Refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes.

2. Slice dough crosswise slightly thicker than ½ inch. Reshape if needed. Bake at 350° on parchment-lined baking sheets until firm, 12 to 14 minutes.

Layered Icebox Cookies

YIELD: MAKES ABOUT 12 DOZEN

18  CHOCOLATE-PECAN: ½ batch Chocolate Dough + ½ batch Spice Dough + ¼ cup raspberry jam + 1 cup mixed ground pecans and semisweet chocolate

19  APRICOT-PISTACHIO: 1 batch Citrus Dough + ¾ cup apricot jam + 1 cup ground pistachios

20  RASPBERRY-ALMOND: 1 batch Spice Dough + ½ cup raspberry jam + ¼ cup ground blanched almonds

1. Shape dough into 2 disks. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour.

2. Roll out each disk ¼ inch thick on a floured piece of parchment. Cut into 2-by-9-inch strips. Spread 2 teaspoons jam onto 1 strip; sprinkle with 2 tablespoons ground nut filling. Repeat, layering 3 to 5 more strips, ending with a plain strip.

3. Wrap in parchment. Refrigerate until firm, at least 2 hours. Slice dough crosswise slightly thicker than ¼ inch. Bake at 350° on parchment-lined baking sheets until firm, 12 to 14 minutes.
METHOD #3
Press, bake, glaze

Glazed Spritz Cookies

YIELD: ABOUT 4 DOZEN

21  —  CITRUS-GLAZED COOKIES: 1 batch plain or tinted Vanilla Dough or Spice Dough (pressed into any shape) + 1 batch Citrus Glaze

22  —  VANILLA-GLAZED COOKIES: 1 batch plain or tinted Vanilla Dough (pressed into any shape) + 1 batch Vanilla Glaze

23  —  WHITE-CHOCOLATE-GLAZED COOKIES: 1 batch plain or tinted Vanilla Dough (pressed into any shape) + 1 cup melted white chocolate (8 ounces) + small candies (optional)

24  —  VANILLA-GLAZED SWIRL COOKIES: ½ batch Chocolate Dough + ½ batch Vanilla Dough (pressed into any shape) + 1 batch Vanilla Glaze

1. Knead dough briefly to soften. Fill a cookie press with dough (if making No. 24, fill with both kinds of dough), and fit with disk to make shapes. Squeeze cookies directly onto a baking sheet. Sprinkle with sanding sugar (optional). Bake at 350° until firm, 12 to 14 minutes.

2. Let cool completely before dipping in glaze, below, or melted white chocolate. Apply small or crushed candies (optional) while glaze is wet. Let vanilla- or citrus-glazed cookies set on a wire rack. Let white-chocolate-glazed cookies set in refrigerator, and keep chilled until ready to serve.

Vanilla Glaze

YIELD: MAKES 1 CUP (ENOUGH TO GLAZE 4 DOZEN SPRITZ COOKIES)

3 cups sifted confectioners’ sugar
¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons whole milk
3 tablespoons light corn syrup
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. Whisk together all ingredients until smooth.

CITRUS GLAZE VARIATION
Swap out milk and vanilla extract for ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons fresh citrus juice and 3 teaspoons finely grated citrus zest.
Cutout Cookies

YIELD: MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN (VARIES DEPENDING ON SHAPES)

25. **STAINED-GLASS SNOWMEN:** 1 batch Vanilla Dough or Chocolate Dough + crushed hard candies (+ star cutout, optional)
   Technique: Stained Glass | Cookie cutters: Snowman, small fluted or plain round cutter; and #12 Ateco pastry tip (for button holes) or star aspic cutter

26. **SUGARED WREATHS:** 1 batch Vanilla Dough + green or red fine sanding sugar + small candies or fluted cutout (optional)
   Technique: Sugaring | Cookie cutters: 2 1/2-inch and 3/4-inch fluted round cutters

27. **STAINED-GLASS WREATHS:** 1 batch tinted Vanilla Dough + crushed hard candies
   Technique: Stained Glass | Cookie cutters: 2 1/2-inch and 3/4-inch fluted round cutters + #12 Ateco pastry tip (for ornaments)

28. **FLUTED WREATHS:** 1 batch Vanilla Dough + green fine sanding sugar (+ star cutout)
   Technique: Sugaring | Cookie cutters: 3/4-inch fluted round (overlap cutouts), and star aspic cutter

29. **COOKIE HOUSES:** 1 batch Vanilla Dough or Chocolate Dough + crushed or whole hard candies (+ door or tree cutouts)
   Techniques: Stained Glass + Puzzle | Cookie cutters: 2 3/4-inch square, mini, and small fluted cutters (for window)

30. **CHRISTMAS TREES:** 1 batch tinted Vanilla Dough + fine green sanding sugar (optional) + ornament or star cutouts
   Techniques: Stained Glass or Puzzle | Cookie cutters: Trees in assorted sizes, star aspic cutter, #12 Ateco pastry tip (for ornaments)

1. Shape dough into 2 disks, and wrap each in plastic wrap. Refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour. Roll out 1 disk on a lightly floured piece of parchment ¼ to ½ inch thick. Repeat with remaining disk. Refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes. Cut out desired shapes. Follow Sugaring, Stained Glass, or Puzzle directions (sidebar). Affix candy or cookie embellishments to cooled cookies using a dot of glaze.

Techniques

| SUGARING |

Before baking, brush cookie shapes with water, and sprinkle generously with sanding sugar. Refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes. Bake at 350° until cookies are firm, 12 to 15 minutes.

| STAINED GLASS |

After cutting out cookie shapes, cut out small shapes within cookies where you want “stained glass” to appear. Refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes. Bake at 350° 4 minutes (if you’ll be using whole candies) or 8 minutes (if you’ll be using crushed candies). Fill cutouts with candy. Bake until cookies are firm and candies are melted, 5 to 8 minutes more.

| PUZZLE |

After cutting out cookie shapes, cut out shapes within. Working with dough in a contrasting color, cut out puzzle pieces to fit within cutouts. Chill shapes and pieces until firm, about 30 minutes. Fit puzzle pieces into cookies (or place them on top). Refrigerate 30 minutes more. Bake at 350° on parchment-lined baking sheets until cookies are firm, 12 to 15 minutes.
Your Cookie Cheat Sheet

Desired yield: ........................................

Method:  □ Roll, press, bake, fill
         □ Mix in, refrigerate, slice, bake
         □ Press, bake, glaze
         □ Roll out, cut out, decorate, bake

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