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How to Bake Perfect Christmas Cookies

Everybody enjoys baking and decorating cookies for the Christmas season. For many households it is a family tradition that will hopefully be passed down to future generations, as these traditions become memories that will last a lifetime.

There are times when making and decorating cookies that things do not go as expected, and the cookies just do not turn out as they should. To successfully make the desired quality cookie, one must start by using quality ingredients. Bakers should avoid using low-fat spreads with 60 percent or less fat in place of butter or margarine in baking recipes. Low-fat spreads have higher moisture content and will make cookie dough very soft. Soft cookie dough is not ideal, as it can cause challenges in remainder of the making and baking process.

When rolling out the dough, it can begin sticking to the rolling pin. When this happens, lightly dust the surface of the area the dough is on as well as the rolling pin to prevent sticking. A pastry cloth and/or stockinette-covered rolling pin can be used to make rolling the dough easier, and to help prevent dough from sticking. Rub the flour evenly onto the rolling pin and pastry cloth for easy handling. You may need to occasionally repeat dusting the pin or surface with flour.

After the dough has been rolled out, cut to the perfect cookie shape and placed on the cookie sheet another issue that can occur is the dough spreading and becoming flat while baking. If this happens, refrigerate more dough until well chilled (approximately one to two hours). If the dough is too soft, stir in one to two tablespoons of flour.

Once the cookies have been cut out, the next step is to prepare a baking sheet. A desirable cookie sheet may be open on one, two or three sides and will be at least two inches narrower and shorter than the oven. To achieve an evenly browned cookie, use a baking stone, or a shiny, aluminum cookie sheet. One thing that may cause the cookies to spread too much is spraying the cookie

sheet. It is not necessary, and can cause the cookies to spread too much and brown too quickly around the edges. Watch dark colored cookie sheets, as they may cause cookies to brown quickly. Once you are ready to place the dough on the sheet, make sure there are about two inches of space around the cookie sheet to allow for good air circulation while baking. Place one cookie sheet in the oven at a time in the middle of the center rack of the oven. If cookies are baked on the bottom rack of the oven, they may burn or not bake evenly.

Once the cookies have been made, freeze for later use for up to 2 months. Arrange cookies in a container lined with plastic food wrap or aluminum foil. For the best results, wrap the cookies individually in plastic wrap. Separate with layers of aluminum foil or plastic food wrap. Store in an airtight container, label and date each container. Thaw the cookies by letting them stand loosely covered on a serving plate for about 20 minutes before frosting or serving.

For answers to additional baking questions or any other topic related to nutrition, food safety and health topics please contact Holly Miner at haminer@ksu.edu or call 620-331-2690.

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