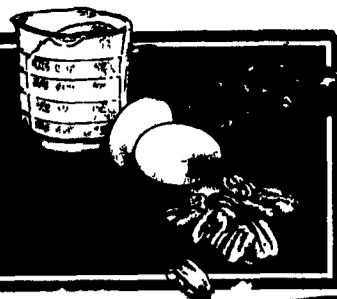




Home on the Range



Holiday Baking

Holiday Baking Checklist

- Select a few favorite recipes and one or two new ones. Review each recipe carefully and take an inventory of ingredients and staples. Be sure to stock up on any missing items before baking day to avoid last-minute dashes to the store.

- Check the use-by dates on baking powder and baking soda; replenish any that are past the expiration date.

- Clear off counter tops and the kitchen table so you'll have enough space to spread out. Set up stations for mixing, shaping/rolling, cooling and decorating.

- Pull out the mixer and appropriate baking pans and cookie sheets, measuring cups, measuring spoons, and any other equipment called for before you start baking.

- Use only the highest quality ingredients, like pure extracts, fresh large eggs and pure, natural butter. You can taste the difference.

- Don't use whipped butter for baking. Measurements will not be equal because whipped butter contains more moisture and air.

- Printed measurements on sticks of butter make measuring easy and convenient. Good-to-know butter equivalents are: 1 pound, 4 sticks, 2 cups, (32 tablespoons); ½ pound, 2 sticks, 1 cup, (16 tablespoons); ¼ pound, 1 stick, ½ cup, (8 tablespoons); ⅓ pound, ⅓ stick, ⅓ cup, (4 tablespoons).

Storing Butter

Refrigerator: Unopened butter in the original package keeps for several weeks in the refrigerator at 39°F or lower.* Opened butter should be stored, covered, in the refrigerator butter compartment.

Freezer: Butter in its original package and wrapped in foil or placed in a resealable plastic freezer bag keeps for six to nine months at 0°F or lower.

*Because salt helps extend butter's shelf life, unsalted butter is best kept frozen until ready to use.

Storing, Packaging and Freezing Cookies

- Cool cookies completely before storing in airtight containers or they will become soggy.

- Store only one kind of cookie in each container. Moist cookies packed with crisp ones can cause the crisp cookies to soften; highly flavored cookies such as gingersnaps can transfer flavors to delicately flavored cookies such as shortbread.

- Store frosted or decorated cookies with waxed paper between layers to protect them.

- If bar cookies are to be eaten immediately, they can be stored in the baking pan. Keep tightly covered.

- Most cookies freeze beautifully. Freeze fragile cookies in sturdy cookie tins with waxed paper between layers. Package sturdier varieties in heavy-duty freezer bags or airtight containers.

- Label containers with a ballpoint pen or waterproof marker. Include the type of cookie, quantity and the date.

- Thaw cookies at room temperature in their container or wrapping.

BERRY-ALMOND BARS

1 cup butter, softened
½ cup confectioners' sugar
2¼ cups all-purpose flour
1 10-ounce jar seedless raspberry jam or any flavor
½ cup sliced almonds, lightly toasted

Confectioners' sugar (optional)
Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In large mixing bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Gradually add flour, beating on low speed until well blended. With floured fingertips, press dough evenly onto bottom of 15x10x1-inch baking pan. Bake 18 to 20 minutes until light golden brown. Cool on rack 15 minutes.

Stir jam gently to blend; spread evenly over crust. Sprinkle almonds evenly over jam. Bake 10-13 minutes, just until jam begins to bubble around edges. Cool completely on wire rack. Cut into bars or other shapes. If desired, sprinkle with confectioners' sugar just before serving. Yield: 5 dozen.

Variations: Chocolate-Drizzled Bars: Melt ¼ cup semisweet chocolate pieces or white chocolate pieces according to package directions. Transfer to small resealable bag; seal tightly. Snip small hole in one corner of bag. Squeeze thin lines of chocolate over cookies. Let set 30 minutes; cut into bars.

Almond Glazed Bars: Mix together ¼ cup confectioners' sugar, 1 to 1½ tablespoons milk or cream and ¼ teaspoon almond extract until smooth; drizzle over cookies. Let set 30 minutes; cut into bars.

Am. Dairy Association



A delightful display of cookies makes holiday entertaining inviting.

NUTMEG BUTTER THINS

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup firmly packed brown sugar

1 egg
2 teaspoons vanilla
Combine flour, nutmeg and salt; mix well. Set aside. In large mixing bowl, cream butter and sugars until light and fluffy. Beat in egg and vanilla. Add flour mixture; mix well. Divide dough in half. Shape each half into a roll about 10 inches long and 1½ inches in diameter. Wrap each roll in plastic wrap; chill at least 3 hours or overnight.

Preheat oven to 400°F. Work with one roll of dough at a time, leaving remaining dough wrapped and refrigerated. With sharp knife, cut roll into ¼-inch thick slices. Place 1 inch apart on cookie sheets. Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until edges are light golden brown. Remove to wire rack; cool completely.

Yield: about 6 dozen.

Variations

Spice Butter Thins: Reduce nutmeg to ½ teaspoon and add 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon and ¼ teaspoon ground cloves to flour mixture.

Nutty Butter Thins: Stir 1 cup toasted, finely chopped pecans or hazelnuts into dough before shaping. Or, roll shaped dough in 1 cup toasted, finely chopped nuts before chilling.

Sugar 'N' Spice Butter Thins: Sprinkle sliced cookies with cinnamon-sugar or nutmeg-sugar before baking.

Note: Rolls of cookie dough can be wrapped airtight and refrigerated up to 2 weeks or frozen up to 6 months. Thaw frozen dough overnight in the refrigerator. Slice and bake as directed above.

(Turn to Page B8)

Recipe Topics

If you have recipes for the topics listed below, please share them with us. We welcome your recipes, but ask that you include accurate measurements, a complete list of ingredients and clear instructions with each recipe you submit. Send your recipes to Lou Ann Good, Lancaster Farming, P.O. Box 609, Ephrata, PA 17522. Recipes should reach our office one week before publishing date.

December

- 9- Gifts from the Kitchen
- 16- Holiday Snacks
- 23- Holiday Buffet
- 30- Your Favorite Recipe From Lancaster Farming

Featured Recipe

Berks County Dairy Princess Jennifer Davis is studying dairy and animal science at Penn State's Berks Campus where she belongs to the Ag Club and the Wise Women in Science and Engineering Club.

Jennifer helps her parents, Ray and Frances Davis, with their 350-acre JMJ-Spring Pond Farm in Leesport, where they raise Holsteins, corn, and hay.

Jennifer considers it a privilege to promote dairy products. Here is a cookie recipe that she believes our readers will enjoy.

CHOCOLATE PIXIES

¼ cup butter
2 ounces unsweetened chocolate
2 eggs
1 cup sugar
1½ cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ cup chopped walnuts
Confectioners' sugar

Melt butter and chocolate in a heavy saucepan over low heat. Beat eggs and sugar in a large mixer bowl. Gradually mix in chocolate mixture. Combine flour, baking powder, and salt, gradually add to chocolate mixture. Stir in walnuts. Chill dough at least one hour.

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Shape dough into one-inch balls. Roll in confectioners' sugar. Place on buttered cookie sheets. Bake 15 to 18 minutes. Cool completely on wire racks.