

Cookie Swap Tips

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A Christmas cookie swap is a great tradition to start. You get to sample other family-favorite cookies and add variety to your holiday cookie platter...and you may just have a fun evening with good friends.

Here are some tips to help you have a successful cookie swap!

A typical cookie swap is a one-to-one dozen swap: Every participant brings a dozen cookies for every other swapper. So if you have 6 participants, everyone would bring 5 dozen cookies, 1 dozen for each other member.

The swap can also be less than dozen cookies per person. Perhaps your group would prefer to swap a half-dozen cookies.

Or it can even be more open, with everyone bringing a certain number of cookies. In this case, the number of cookies would be divided by the number of swappers...and each participant would take home that number of cookies. To make it easier to make their selection, participants would each put their cookies on a platter with the name of the cookie, and then everyone could go around the table or counter and select the cookies they would like.

Limit the number of participants in the group. Eight (plus or minus) is a good number: Not too many dozens of cookies to make but a nice variety to take back.

Decide on the best place and time to swap cookies. One member's home centrally located makes it easier for everyone.

Determine if the actual swap meeting is meant to be a quick grab-the-cookies-and-go or a more relaxed, hang-out-and-chat evening. If the latter, decide if you want to have a cookie tasting as part of the swap. Everyone will need to make an extra dozen cookies for the group if that is the case. If there's no plan to nibble on cookies during a more relaxed swap, the hostess should provide other light refreshments so people won't be tempted to eat their cookies!

The group should discuss the cookies each member plan to make beforehand. Not to necessarily say "No" to anyone, but rather to make sure that you don't get back 7 different types of chocolate chip cookie! Alternatively, the group could brainstorm types of cookies, and members could sign up for a particular type.

If a family has good bakers, there are usually at least a couple recipes that are unique to that family. Encourage swap members to bring those unusual family favorites.

Decide if you want to keep it strictly to cookies or if you want to branch out to bars/brownies or even candy. It would be best determined by the group. What is each member's holiday specialty or favorite? That would make for a great swap.

Everyone should bring a copy of their recipe for each of the other swappers.

Decide ahead of time whether the baker will package up their dozens of cookies or if everyone is supposed to bring their own bags and tins. If the latter, cookies with similar flavor profiles could be stored together.

Here are some favorite recipes from several long-standing cookie swap members. Some are small-batch recipes, so they may not work for your cookie swap. But they were too good not to share!

Pecan Tassies

Source: Selma Robinson-Ayers

Makes 3 1/2 dozen

SHELLS

1 (3-ounce) package cream cheese, softened

8 tablespoons butter, softened, divided use

1 cup all-purpose flour

PECAN FILLING

3/4 cup packed light brown sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Pinch of salt

1 large egg

2/3 cup pecans, chopped, divided use

Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a small bowl with the mixer at high speed, beat the cream cheese with 7 tablespoons butter until creamy. Reduce speed to low, add flour, and beat well. Form dough into 1" balls. Gently press balls evenly onto bottoms and up sides of ungreased miniature tart or muffin pans. Place tart pans on cookie sheets for easier handling.

PECAN FILLING

In a medium bowl with a fork or wire whisk, mix brown sugar, vanilla, salt, egg, and remaining tablespoon butter until well blended. Place half the pecans in pastry-lined pans. Spoon 1/2 teaspoon filling into tart shells. Sprinkle tops with remaining pecans.

Bake about 20 minutes, or until filling is set and edges of crust are lightly golden. Gently loosen cookies from pans, and place on wire racks to cool completely.

Store in airtight containers.

Cocoa Puffs

Source: Yvonne Alsup

Makes 4 1/2 dozen

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup butter or margarine, softened
1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa
Granulated sugar

Combine flour, baking powder, and salt; set aside. With mixer at medium speed, beat butter or margarine and sugar until fluffy. Add eggs and vanilla, and then cocoa. Add dry ingredients; blend well. Chill dough.

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Roll dough into 1" balls, and roll in sugar.

Bake 8 minutes, or until the top of the cookie begins to crack.

Date Nut Balls

Source: Selma Robinson-Ayers

Makes 4 dozen nut balls

1/2 cup butter, softened
2 cups packed light brown sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup chopped dates
2 cups flaky coconut
2 cups Rice Krispies
2 cups chopped pecans
Confectioners' sugar

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, melt butter. Add sugar, vanilla extract, and chopped dates. Bring mixture to a boil, and then reduce heat, stirring constantly for about 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in coconut, Rice Krispies, and chopped pecans. Let mixture cool completely.

Form mixture into 1" balls, using rounded teaspoonfuls. Roll balls in confectioners' sugar, and store in airtight containers.

Chocolate Mint Meringues

Source: Yvonne Alsup

Makes about 2 1/2 dozen

2 egg whites

1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar

1/3 cup sugar

1/2 cup chocolate mint chips

Preheat oven to 275°F. Line cookie sheets with parchment.

In a small mixer bowl, beat egg whites and cream of tartar until soft peaks form.

Gradually add sugar; beat until stiff peaks form. Fold in mint chips.

Bake 20 minutes. Turn oven off; let stand in oven 30 minutes with the door slightly ajar.

Cool; peel cookies off parchment paper. Store in an airtight container.

Chocolate Mint Cutouts

Source: Yvonne Alsup

Makes about 4 dozen cookies

1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
3/4 cup butter, softened
1 cup powdered sugar
2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon mint extract
A few drops green food coloring
1/4 cup mint-flavored semisweet chocolate chips

Beat cream cheese, butter, and sugar in a large mixing bowl at medium speed with electric mixer until well blended. Add flour and soda; mix well. Add mint extract and green food coloring to the dough; mix well. Makes 3 cups dough. Chill 30 minutes.

Preheat oven to 325°F.

On lightly floured surface, roll dough to 1/8" thickness; cut with assorted 3" cookie cutters. Place on ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake 10 to 12 minutes, or until edges begin to brown. Cool on wire rack.

Melt mint-flavored chocolate chips in small saucepan over low heat, stirring until smooth. Drizzle over cookies.

Chocolate Snowballs
Source: Yvonne Alsup
Makes 3 1/2 dozen

4 squares unsweetened baking chocolate
1/2 cup vegetable oil
2 cups sugar
4 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
Nuts (optional)

Melt unsweetened baking chocolate in a bowl. Add vegetable oil and sugar. Beat in eggs one at a time. Add vanilla. Sift in flour, baking powder, and salt. Stir in nuts, if using.

Chill several hours or overnight.

Preheat oven to 350°F

Roll into balls. Dip generously in powdered sugar. Bake for 12 minutes. Balls will burst open and should be soft when cooled. Work quickly with dough; it softens with handling.

Gingerbread Cookies

Source: Yolanda Hudson

6 cups sifted all-purpose flour, plus more for work surface
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 pound (2 sticks) butter
1 cup packed dark brown sugar
4 teaspoons ground ginger
4 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cloves
1 teaspoon finely ground black pepper
1 1/2 teaspoon salt
2 large eggs
1 cup unsulfured molasses

In a large bowl, sift together flour, baking soda, and baking powder. Set aside.

In an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream butter and sugar on medium speed until fluffy. Mix in spices and salt, and then eggs and molasses. Reduce speed to low, add flour mixture, and combine. Divide dough in half, and shape into flattened disks; wrap in plastic. Chill at least 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Prepare baking sheets with parchment paper. Gather a long offset spatula; a wide, dry brush; cookie cutters.

Remove dough from refrigerator, and let stand at room temperature for about 10 minutes. Place a large piece of parchment paper on a clean surface and dust generously with flour using a pastry brush.

Roll dough to a scant 1/4" thickness, stopping every few turns to release the dough from the paper by running the offset spatula under the dough. Add more flour as necessary to prevent the dough from sticking. Transfer parchment paper and dough to the freezer to chill until very firm, about 15 minutes.

Remove dough from the freezer. Working quickly, cut into desired shapes. If dough begins to warm up and soften, return it to the freezer for a few minutes. Using a wide spatula, transfer to baking sheets; freeze until firm, about 15 minutes.

Bake 8 to 10 minutes, or until crisp but not darkened, rotating halfway through. Let cookies cool on wire racks, and then decorate as desired.

White Chocolate Chunk Cookies (with Dark Chocolate variation)

Source: Selma Robinson-Ayers

Makes about 2 dozen large cookies

1 cup butter
1 cup granulated sugar
1 cup light brown sugar
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup Baker's white chocolate chunks
1 1/2 cups chopped macadamia nuts

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Cream the butter and both sugars. Add eggs and vanilla, and mix together with flour, salt, baking powder, and baking soda. Stir in chocolate chunks and macadamia nuts.

Drop by tablespoonfuls onto ungreased cookie sheets. Bake for 10 to 13 minutes, until cookies are set.

Cool 1 minute, and remove from cookie sheets. Cool completely on wire racks.

DARK CHOCOLATE CHUNK COOKIE VARIATION

Use 1 cup Baker's dark chocolate chunks and add 1 package (8 squares) melted semi-sweet baking chocolate, increase flour to 2 1/2 cups, and substitute walnuts for macadamia nuts.

Nut Macaroons

Source: Trinette Cole

Makes 3 dozen

3 egg whites

1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar

1/2 teaspoon vanilla

1 cup sugar

1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

2 cups finely chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 400°F. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

Beat egg whites, cream of tartar, and vanilla in a medium mixing bowl with electric mixer until soft peaks form. Gradually add sugar, flour, and pecans, beating at high speed until stiff peaks form.

Drop by rounded teaspoonfuls onto cookie sheet.

Bake for 5 to 7 minutes, or until lightly browned. Cool 1 to 2 minutes on wire rack.

Lemon Squares

Source: Valerie Williams

1/2 cup butter or margarine, softened
3 ounces cream cheese, softened
1/2 cup confectioners' sugar
1 1/4 cup unbleached all-purpose flour, divided use
3 large eggs
1/4 cup granulated sugar
3/4 teaspoon baking powder
2 teaspoons lemon zest
6 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
Confectioners' sugar, for finishing (if desired)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease an 8" x 8" square pan.

In a large bowl, beat butter, cream cheese, and confectioners' sugar until fluffy. Stir in 1 cup flour. Mix until the dough comes together. Using floured fingers, pat dough into the pan, making evenly flat. Bake for 20 minutes.

In a medium-size bowl, beat eggs lightly; stir in granulated sugar, zest of lemon, remaining flour, baking powder, and lemon juice. Pour over crust, and bake until filling is set, about 20 minutes. Do not overbake.

Cut into squares. Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar, if using.

Butter Diamond Cookies

Source: Diane Neas

Makes about 2 dozen

1/2 pound butter

1 cup sugar

1 egg yolk

1 teaspoon vanilla

2 cups flour

1 beaten egg white

2/3 cup chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 325°F.

Cream butter and sugar together. Add egg yolk and vanilla. Mix in flour. Spread and pat down into a (15" x 10") jellyroll pan or cookie sheet with sides. Brush on egg white, and sprinkle pecans over cookie dough.

Bake 30 minutes, or until golden in color. Cut into diamonds while hot; cool in pan.

Italian Chocolate Pizzelle

Source: Jessica C. Brown

Makes 30 cookies

3 eggs, beaten
3/4 cup sugar
3/4 cup butter or margarine, melted
1 1/2 to 2 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
2 teaspoons vanilla
1 teaspoon anise seed or extract
3 tablespoons cocoa
3 tablespoons sugar
Powdered sugar, for dusting

Add and beat eggs, water, melted butter, flour, baking powder, vanilla, and anise seed together in order listed (use the smaller amount of flour for thinner pizzelle). Mix together cocoa and sugar separately, and add to batter.

Drop by rounded spoonfuls onto the center of the preheated grid of a pizzelle iron. Close lid, and immediately clip handles together. Allow to cook until steaming stops, about 30 seconds. Remove with fork, and allow to cool on wire rack or towels.

Dust with powdered sugar. Store in an airtight container.

Caramel-Pecan Triangles
Source: Sherry Trabert
Makes about 4 dozen

CRUST

1 cup firmly packed brown sugar
3/4 cup melted butter
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon bourbon
1/2 cup flour
1/2 cup cocoa powder
1/2 teaspoon salt

CARAMEL-PECAN FILLING

3/4 cup butter
1/2 cup dark corn syrup
3 cups brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
2/3 cup heavy whipping cream
2 tablespoons vanilla extract
1 teaspoon bourbon
3 1/2 cups toasted pecan pieces (see TIP)

Preheat oven to 375°F. Line a 13" x 9" baking pan with foil. Grease bottom and sides well (don't skip this), and set aside.

CRUST

Beat brown sugar, melted butter, eggs, vanilla, and bourbon in a bowl at medium speed until smooth. In a separate bowl, combine flour, cocoa, and salt. Gradually add to the brown sugar mixture, beating until blended. Spread into prepared pan, and bake for 15 minutes. Cool on a wire rack.

CARAMEL-PECAN FILLING

Bring butter, syrup, brown sugar, and salt to a boil, stirring constantly until a candy thermometer registers 250°F (hard-ball stage). Remove from heat. Quickly stir in whipping cream, vanilla, and bourbon until blended. Stir in pecans.

Pour filling all over the crust. Bake for 25 minutes.

Cool on a wire rack, and then chill overnight (or at least 8 hours). Lift foil from pan, peel foil off, and then cut caramels into 1 1/2" squares. Cut the squares diagonally into triangles. Store in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

TIP

To toast pecans, preheat oven to 400°F. Spread pecans out on a cookie sheet, and bake for 10 to 15 minutes, or until fragrant. Watch carefully. Remove to cool, and turn the oven back to 375°F to continue baking the triangles.

Snowflakes

Makes 8 1/2 dozen

Source: Sherry Trabert

Sherry Says: The dough for this recipe may be made ahead and stored in the freezer in a plastic bag. To poke two different-sized holes, I use a coffee stirrer and a turkey baster.

4 cups flour

3 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon nutmeg

1 cup butter

1/2 cup Crisco

1 1/2 cups granulated sugar

2 eggs

2 tablespoons lemon juice

Confectioners' sugar, sifted

Stir together flour, baking powder, cinnamon, salt, and nutmeg. In a large mixer bowl, beat butter and Crisco just to soften. Add sugar, and beat until fluffy. Add eggs and lemon juice. Beat well. Add flour mixture. Mix until well blended. Chill or freeze.

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Roll out the dough, cut with a six-sided cutter, 2 inches by 3 inches. Poke decorative holes into cookies with two different sized straws.

Bake for 10 minutes, or until edges are lightly browned. Remove right away and cool.

Dust with confectioners' sugar.

Butterscotch Cookies

Source: Keith Collora

Makes about 2 dozen cookies

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sifted flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup soft butter
6 tablespoons granulated sugar
6 tablespoons brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon maple syrup
1 teaspoon water
1 egg
1 cup rolled oats
1 cup butterscotch bits, crushed
1/2 cup chopped nuts

Preheat oven to 375°F. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

Sift together flour, baking soda, and salt. Cream butter, sugar, maple syrup, and water. Add egg, and mix well. Add flour mixture and oats to the batter. Stir in butterscotch bits and chopped nuts.

Drop cookies onto a cookie sheet in the desired size. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes.

Gingerbread Men

Source: Mandy Katz

Makes 5 dozen

1 cup sugar

3/4 cup butter, softened

1/4 cup molasses

1 egg

2 1/4 cups all-purpose, unbleached flour

2 tablespoons baking soda

1 tablespoon cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ginger

1/2 teaspoon cloves

1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

SUGAR OR GLAZE TOPPING

1/4 cup sugar for sprinkling

OR a glaze, use powdered sugar mixed with milk to drizzling consistency

Beat 1 cup sugar, butter, molasses, and egg until fluffy. Stir in remaining ingredients (except topping). Separate into three portions, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate at least 1 hour.

Heat oven to 350°F. Roll out the first portion until very, very thin, and cut with gingerbread-man cookie cutter.

If you want a crackly sugar topping, brush the top of gingerbread with a damp pastry brush, and sprinkle with sugar. If you want a drizzle or to decorate each cookie, skip the pastry brush and sugar.

Cookies may be placed very close together as they will not increase in size. Bake until set, approximately 8 to 12 minutes. Cool on wire rack.

To decorate with drizzle, combine powdered sugar and milk until thin, and place in a piping bag. Decorate by outlining gingerbread man or by creating swirls or stripes.

Peppermint Cookies

2/3 cup crushed peppermint candy canes
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
3/4 cup butter flavor CRISCO shortening (no substitutions)
2 tablespoons milk
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
1 egg
1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
3/4 teaspoon baking soda

Crush peppermint candy canes by sealing them in a plastic food storage bag and rolling them with a rolling pin. Set aside. Preheat oven to 375°F. Cream together the brown sugar, shortening, milk, and vanilla extract in a large bowl. Beat at medium speed with electric mixer until well blended. Add egg, and beat well. In a separate bowl, combine flour, salt, and baking soda. Add to creamed mixture, beating at low speed just until blended. Stir in crushed peppermint candy.

Shape dough into 1" balls and place on an ungreased baking sheet about 2" apart. Bake 8 to 10 minutes for chewy cookies or 11 to 13 minutes for crisp cookies, but don't overbake. Cool 2 minutes on baking sheet. Remove cookies to baking racks to cool completely.

Peanut Blossoms

Makes about 4 dozen cookies

1 3/4 cup all-purpose flour

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 cup firmly packed brown sugar

1 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup shortening

1/2 cup peanut butter

2 tablespoons milk

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 large egg

48 milk chocolate candy kisses, foil wrappers removed

Sugar (for rolling dough)

Preheat oven to 375°F. Combine flour, 1/2 cup sugar, brown sugar, baking soda, salt, shortening, peanut butter, milk, vanilla extract, and egg. Blend well at low speed of electric mixer until a stiff dough forms. Sprinkle a little sugar on a sheet of wax paper. Shape dough into 1" balls, and roll each ball in sugar. Place 2" apart on ungreased cookie sheets. Bake 10 to 12 minutes, or until lightly browned. While cookies are still hot, top each cookie with a candy kiss, pressing down firmly. Cookies will crack around the edges. Remove from cookie sheet, and cool completely.

Santa's Cookie Bars

- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 1 1/2 cups finely crushed cinnamon graham cracker crumbs
- 1 (14-ounce) can Eagle Brand sweetened condensed milk (NOT evaporated)
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 1/2 cups Angel flake coconut
- 3/4 cup chopped cashew nuts
- 3/4 cup chopped cocktail peanuts
- 1/2 cup semisweet chocolate holiday bits

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a 13" x 9" baking pan with aluminum foil. Extend foil two inches at both ends and above sides of pan.

Melt butter in a microwave-proof dish. Pour butter into pan, and tilt pan to coat evenly. Sprinkle cracker crumbs over butter. Pour condensed milk over crumbs. Top with chocolate chips, coconut, cashews, peanuts, and bits. Press down gently.

Bake about 25 minutes, or until edges are lightly browned. Cool in pan on a wire rack. When cooled, lift aluminum foil by the corners, and lift from the pan. Cut into squares. and remove foil. Store in an airtight container at room temperature. Freezes well.