
KATE MARSDEN
THE COMPLETE BOOK OF
CHRISTMAS
BISCUITS
Classic, festive and irresistible recipes for a sweeter Christmas
BAKE
SHARE
CELEBRATE
KATE MARSDEN

LIBROVA

BOOK 1

The Complete Book of Christmas Biscuits

Classic, festive and irresistible recipes for a sweeter Christmas

Bake · Share · Celebrate

Kate Marsden

LIBROVA · 2026

Your member area
All the books in your bundle are always available at this address:
https://librova.eu/en-ca/pages/member-area-christmas-baking-x7q4m2

The Complete Book of Christmas Biscuits – Classic, festive and irresistible recipes for a sweeter Christmas
Kate Marsden

© 2026 Librova. All rights reserved. This publication is for the purchaser's personal use only. Copying, sharing or reselling it without the publisher's permission is not allowed.

Please note: these recipes use ingredients that can cause allergies (gluten, egg, milk, nuts and others): always check the ingredients if you are baking for someone with an allergy or intolerance. Do not serve dishes containing raw egg to pregnant women, young children, older people or anyone with a weakened immune system; use the alternatives given. When children help in the kitchen, an adult always handles the oven, hot oil and knives. Drinks and syrups containing alcohol are not for children. Times and temperatures depend on your oven: always keep an eye on the first batch.

Contents

1. A word from the author
2. Before you begin
3. Classic biscuits
4. Ginger and spice
5. Filled and decorated biscuits
6. Portuguese and world traditions
7. Icing and decorating, step by step
8. Biscuits to give and a baking plan

A word from the author

There is a moment in December that I love: when the first tray of biscuits comes out of the oven and the whole house smells of butter, cinnamon and orange. Someone wanders into the kitchen "just to have a look", and ends up staying.

I wrote this book to make that moment easy to repeat, even if you have never baked a biscuit before. I have gathered classic recipes, gingerbread and spiced biscuits, filled and decorated biscuits, and a few traditions from Portugal and other countries that look lovely on any Christmas table.

Every recipe follows the same path: ingredients weighed in grams, numbered steps, the oven temperature and, above all, the signs that tell you the biscuits are ready. At the end of each recipe there is a note on how long the biscuits keep, plus an idea for a variation or a mistake to avoid.

If you are just starting out, read the chapter "Before you begin" first. It is only a few pages, and it will save you a lot of failed batches. Then choose a recipe marked "Easy" and go at your own pace.

At the end of the book you will find ideas for packing and giving biscuits, and a baking plan for December, so that your

biscuits are ready in good time, with no last-minute rush on Christmas Eve.

Turn on the oven, call whoever likes to help, and enjoy yourself. Biscuits do not have to be perfect to be the best of the Christmas season.

With love,
Kate Marsden

Before you begin

Baking biscuits is simple, but there are half a dozen rules that make all the difference. Read this chapter once, and come back to it whenever you have a question.

Start here

1. Read the recipe all the way through before you start.
2. Take the butter and eggs out of the fridge 1 hour beforehand (unless the recipe calls for cold butter).
3. Weigh all the ingredients and have them to hand.
4. Line the baking trays with baking parchment.
5. Turn on the oven 15 minutes before the first batch goes in.
6. Bake a small test batch of 4 or 5 biscuits first, to get to know your oven.

If this is your first time baking biscuits, start with these three recipes: Butter Biscuits for Cutters (chapter 3), First Gingerbread Biscuits (chapter 4) and Thumbprint Biscuits with Fig Jam (chapter 5).

Equipment

You do not need expensive equipment. With this you can make almost every recipe in the book:

- **Kitchen scales.** This is the most important tool. In baking, weighing gives far more reliable results than measuring in cups.
- **Two large mixing bowls**, one for the dry ingredients and one for the wet.
- **Electric mixer** (a hand mixer is enough). You can also beat by hand with a whisk, but it takes longer.
- **Silicone spatula** and wooden spoon.
- **Rolling pin.** A smooth glass bottle will do in a pinch.
- **Two baking trays** and **baking parchment** (or silicone mats).
- **Wire rack** for cooling. You can use the oven shelf itself.
- **Biscuit cutters**: a round one and one or two Christmas shapes (star, tree, gingerbread person). A thin-rimmed glass also cuts circles.
- **Cling film**, for wrapping the dough before it goes into the fridge.
- **Piping bag** with a star nozzle, only for the piped shortbread. For decorating with icing, a freezer bag with a corner snipped off is enough.

- **Spoon measures.** In this book, 1 tablespoon (tbsp) = 15 ml and 1 teaspoon (tsp) = 5 ml, always level.

Ingredients

- **Flour:** use plain flour (ordinary white flour, with no raising agent). Strong white flour also works. When a recipe needs a raising agent, use baking powder separately.
- **Unsalted butter.** If you only have salted butter, leave the pinch of salt out of the recipe. Do not use spreadable margarine: it contains more water and the biscuits will spread.
- **Medium eggs** (about 50 g without the shell). An egg white weighs about 35 g and an egg yolk about 18 g.
- **Sugar:** caster sugar, icing sugar (for icing and fine doughs) and soft brown sugar (it adds colour, moisture and a caramel flavour).
- **Baking powder and bicarbonate of soda** are not the same thing. Use what the recipe says, in the exact amount.
- **Spices:** cinnamon, ground ginger, ground cloves, nutmeg and aniseed. Spices more than a year old lose their aroma, so buy small jars.
- **Black treacle or dark honey**, for the gingerbread.
- **Nuts:** almonds (whole, flaked and ground), walnuts and pine nuts. Store them in a sealed jar in a cool place.

- **Baking chocolate** and **unsweetened cocoa powder**. Sweetened drinking chocolate powder is not a substitute for cocoa in doughs.
- **Lemon and orange zest:** grate only the coloured part of the peel, as the white pith is bitter. Choose unwaxed citrus fruit and wash it well.

Softened butter, cold butter

Softened butter is butter that gives when you press it with a finger but still holds its shape. It should not be shiny or melted. If you forgot to take it out of the fridge, cut it into small cubes and wait 20 minutes.

Cold butter is used in doughs that are worked by hand (such as the half-moons or the Linzer biscuits). Cut it into cubes and work quickly, so it does not warm up.

Why the dough goes into the fridge

Almost all biscuit doughs rest in the fridge. The cold firms up the butter, and so the dough:

- rolls out without sticking to the rolling pin;
- does not spread in the oven, so the shapes stay sharp;
- has more flavour, because the flour absorbs the liquids.

Wrap the dough in cling film, shaped into a flat disc 2 cm thick. A disc chills much faster than a ball. If the dough becomes too hard, leave it at room temperature for 10 minutes before rolling out.

Rolling out the dough

1. Place the dough between two sheets of baking parchment. That way you do not need extra flour, which makes biscuits dry.
2. Roll from the centre outwards, turning the dough a quarter turn now and then.
3. The right thickness for most cut-out biscuits is **4 to 5 mm**. Two rulers or two wooden skewers placed on either side help you keep the thickness even.
4. If the dough softens while you work, put it back in the fridge, still between the sheets of parchment, for 10 minutes.

Cutting

- Dip the cutter in flour before each cut. Press straight down, without twisting.
- Cut the shapes close together, so there is little dough left over.

- Gather the offcuts, roll them out just once more and cut again. Dough that is worked too many times gives tough biscuits.
- Move the biscuits to the tray with a wide palette knife and leave 2 to 3 cm between them.
- For biscuits with very sharp shapes, put the tray, already filled with the biscuits, in the freezer for 10 minutes before it goes into the oven.

The oven

All the temperatures in this book are for a **conventional oven** (heat from above and below). If your oven is a **fan oven**, lower the temperature by **20 °C**: we give both temperatures in every recipe, along with the gas mark.

- Always preheat the oven for at least 15 minutes.
- Bake one tray at a time, on the middle shelf. With a fan oven you can bake two trays, swapping their positions halfway through.
- Every oven is different. Start checking 2 minutes before the minimum time given.
- Biscuits finish cooking in the heat of the tray. They almost always come out of the oven still a little soft in the middle and firm up as they cool.

- Leave the biscuits on the tray for 5 minutes and then move them to the wire rack.
- Between batches, use a cool tray. If you only have one, run cold water over the underside, dry it and line it again.

Storing

- Only store biscuits once they are completely cold, otherwise the steam will soften them.
- Use tins or jars with tight-fitting lids, in a cool, dry place, away from the hob.
- Do not mix crisp biscuits with soft ones in the same tin: the crisp ones will go soft.
- Iced biscuits are stored in layers separated by baking parchment, once the icing has dried completely.
- Biscuits with a cream or ganache filling go in the fridge.
- Most raw doughs freeze for up to 3 months. So do baked biscuits without icing.

Giving

Biscuits are one of the loveliest Christmas gifts. In chapter 8 you will find ideas for packing them, how long each type of biscuit keeps, and a baking plan for December. One important

rule: always add a label with the name of the biscuits, the date and the ingredients that can cause allergies.

Tip: in each recipe, the line just below the title tells you how many biscuits it makes, how long it takes, the oven temperature, the difficulty and the main allergens (gluten, egg, milk and tree nuts).

Warning: with children in the kitchen, adults deal with the oven, hot trays, melted sugar and knives. Children can weigh, mix, cut with cutters and decorate.

Classic biscuits

These are the biscuits of every Christmas: simple, buttery, flavoured with lemon, cinnamon, chocolate or almond. They are the best way to begin, and they are the base for many decorating ideas.

Butter biscuits for cutters

Makes about 30 biscuits (6 cm cutter) · Preparation: 20 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–12 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

The basic Christmas dough: it rolls out well, keeps the shape of stars and trees, and has a delicate flavour of butter and lemon. Enjoy it plain or decorated with icing.

INGREDIENTS

- 125 g unsalted butter, softened
- 100 g caster sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- Zest of ½ lemon
- 1 pinch of salt
- 250 g plain flour, plus a little extra for the cutters

METHOD

1. In a large bowl, beat the butter with the sugar for 2 to 3 minutes, until creamy and paler.
2. Add the egg, lemon zest and salt, and beat for another 30 seconds.
3. Add the flour in two batches and mix with a spatula, only until you can no longer see dry flour. Do not work it any more than that.
4. Divide the dough into two discs 2 cm thick, wrap them in cling film and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.

5. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
6. Roll out one disc at a time between two sheets of baking parchment, to a thickness of 4 to 5 mm.
7. Cut out the biscuits and move them to the tray, leaving 2 cm between them. Gather the offcuts, roll them out once and cut again.
8. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until the edges are light golden. The centre should still be pale.
9. Leave on the tray for 5 minutes, then move to a wire rack until completely cool.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 2 weeks at room temperature. The raw dough keeps for 3 days in the fridge or 3 months in the freezer. Variation: swap the lemon zest for 1 tsp vanilla extract or the zest of 1 orange. Common mistake: kneading too much after adding the flour makes the biscuits tough.

Piped shortbread

Makes about 35 biscuits · Preparation: 25 min + 15 min chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 12–14 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Biscuits shaped like roses or little crowns, made with a piping bag. They melt in the mouth and look lovely in a biscuit tin.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g unsalted butter, very soft (but not melted)
- 80 g icing sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 pinch of salt
- 260 g plain flour
- To decorate (optional): glacé cherries, cut into quarters

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
2. Beat the butter with the icing sugar for 3 minutes, until very light and fluffy.
3. Add the egg, vanilla and salt, and beat until smooth.
4. Add the flour and mix with the spatula until you have a soft, even dough.

5. Fill a piping bag fitted with a large star nozzle (opening of about 1 cm). Fill it only halfway, so it is easier to squeeze.
6. Holding the bag upright, pipe roses or small crowns 4 cm wide, leaving 3 cm between them. Put a small piece of cherry in the centre, if you like.
7. Put the trays in the fridge for 15 minutes. That way the pattern will not be lost in the oven.
8. Bake for 12 to 14 minutes, until the edges and base are light golden.
9. Leave to cool for 10 minutes on the tray (they break easily when hot) and then move to the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 2 weeks. Common mistake: if the dough is so stiff that it will not come out of the bag, the butter was too cold; warm the bag between your hands for 1 minute. Variation: dip half of each cooled biscuit in melted chocolate.

Cinnamon sugar biscuits

Makes about 22 biscuits · Preparation: 15 min + 30 min chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–11 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Round biscuits, crisp on the outside and soft on the inside, rolled in cinnamon sugar. The smell they leave in the kitchen is pure Christmas.

INGREDIENTS

- 115 g unsalted butter, softened
- 150 g caster sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 200 g plain flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 pinch of salt
- For rolling: 3 tbsp caster sugar and 2 tsp cinnamon

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the sugar for 2 minutes, until creamy. Add the egg and beat for another 30 seconds.
2. In another bowl, mix the flour, baking powder and salt. Add to the butter mixture and stir until you have a soft dough.
3. Cover the bowl and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.

4. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment. On a shallow plate, mix the sugar with the cinnamon.
5. Shape the dough into 25 g balls (about the size of a walnut) and roll each one in the cinnamon sugar until well coated.
6. Place the balls on the tray 5 cm apart: the biscuits spread a lot.
7. Bake for 10 to 11 minutes. They are ready when the edges are firm and the centre still looks a little soft and cracked.
8. Leave on the tray for 5 minutes and then move to the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 1 week; they are best in the first 3 days. Common mistake: waiting for the centre to firm up in the oven; once cool, the biscuits will be dry. Variation: add ¼ tsp nutmeg to the sugar mixture.



Cinnamon sugar biscuits fresh from the oven

Photo: George Pagan III / Unsplash

Lemon slice-and-bake biscuits with lemon icing

Makes about 32 biscuits · Preparation: 20 min + 2 hr chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 12–14 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

A dough that you roll into a log, keep in the cold and slice whenever you fancy freshly baked biscuits. The lemon icing gives them a fresh shine.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g unsalted butter, softened
- 100 g caster sugar
- Zest of 2 lemons
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 pinch of salt
- 280 g plain flour
- For the icing: 120 g icing sugar and 1½ to 2 tbsp lemon juice

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the sugar and lemon zest for 2 minutes. Add the yolk and salt and beat until smooth.
2. Add the flour and mix with the spatula, and then with your hands, until it forms a dough.
3. Divide in two and shape into two logs 5 cm in diameter. Wrap in cling film, twisting the ends like a sweet wrapper.

4. Chill in the fridge for at least 2 hours (or 1 hour in the freezer), until the dough is firm.
5. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
6. With a sharp knife, cut the logs into slices 6 to 7 mm thick. Turn the log a little after each cut, so it does not go flat on one side.
7. Place the slices on the tray 2 cm apart and bake for 12 to 14 minutes, until the edges are light golden.
8. Leave to cool completely on the wire rack.
9. For the icing, mix the icing sugar with the lemon juice, a spoonful at a time, until it is as thick as yoghurt. Spread a teaspoon over each biscuit and leave to set for 1 hour.

Storage: up to 10 days in a tin, in layers separated by baking parchment. The raw dough logs keep for 3 months in the freezer: slice the biscuits straight from frozen and add 2 minutes to the baking time. Variation: use orange instead of lemon, in both the dough and the icing.

Oat, cranberry and orange biscuits

Makes about 22 biscuits · Preparation: 15 min · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 12–14 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Rustic, soft biscuits with the red of cranberries and the fragrance of orange. They are wonderful with a cup of tea in the middle of the afternoon.

INGREDIENTS

- 115 g unsalted butter, softened
- 100 g soft light brown sugar
- 50 g caster sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- Zest of 1 orange
- 130 g plain flour
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 1 pinch of salt
- 150 g rolled oats
- 80 g dried cranberries (or raisins)

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
2. Beat the butter with both sugars for 2 minutes. Add the egg and orange zest and beat for another 30 seconds.

3. In another bowl, mix the flour, bicarbonate of soda, cinnamon and salt. Add to the butter mixture and stir with a spoon.
4. Add the oats and cranberries and stir until evenly distributed.
5. Shape into mounds of 30 g (a well-heaped tablespoon) and place them on the tray 5 cm apart. Flatten them slightly with the palm of your hand.
6. Bake for 12 to 14 minutes, until the edges are golden. The centre stays soft.
7. Leave on the tray for 5 minutes and then move to the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 1 week. Oats may contain traces of gluten. Variation: swap the cranberries for 80 g chopped white chocolate, or use half of each. Common mistake: biscuits that spread too much and turn out thin mean the butter was too soft; chill the dough for 20 minutes before baking.

Chocolate chunk biscuits

Makes about 18 large biscuits · Preparation: 15 min + 30 min chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–12 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

The favourite biscuits of the youngest bakers: golden, soft in the middle and full of chunks of melted chocolate.

INGREDIENTS

- 125 g unsalted butter, melted and lukewarm
- 100 g soft light brown sugar
- 50 g caster sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 200 g plain flour
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- 150 g baking chocolate, chopped into chunks

METHOD

1. In a bowl, whisk the melted butter and both sugars together for 1 minute. Add the egg and vanilla and stir until glossy.
2. Add the flour, bicarbonate of soda and salt and stir with the spatula until no flour is visible.

3. Add the chocolate and fold in. Cover and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
5. Shape into 35 g balls and place them on the tray 6 cm apart (no more than 8 per tray).
6. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. They are ready when the edges are golden and the centre still looks underbaked.
7. Leave on the tray for 10 minutes; they finish cooking and firm up. Then move to the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 5 days. To soften them, warm them for 5 seconds in the microwave. Christmas variation: use white chocolate and add 50 g dried cranberries. Common mistake: taking the biscuits off the tray too soon; while still soft, they break.

Vanilla almond crescents

Makes about 45 biscuits · Preparation: 30 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4), 12–14 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Tiny, very tender crescent moons rolled in icing sugar, inspired by Austria's Christmas biscuits. They melt in the mouth.

INGREDIENTS

- 250 g plain flour
- 100 g ground almonds
- 70 g caster sugar
- 1 pinch of salt
- 200 g unsalted butter, cold, cubed
- 2 egg yolks
- For coating: 60 g icing sugar and 1 tbsp vanilla sugar

METHOD

1. In a large bowl, mix the flour, ground almonds, sugar and salt.
2. Add the butter and rub it in with your fingertips until it looks like coarse sand.
3. Add the yolks and knead quickly, only until a dough forms. Shape into a disc, wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.

4. Preheat the oven to 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment. Mix the icing sugar with the vanilla sugar on a plate.
5. Take portions of 12 g (the size of a large hazelnut). Roll each one into a sausage 7 cm long, with thinner ends, and bend into a crescent shape.
6. Place on the tray 2 cm apart and bake for 12 to 14 minutes. They should stay pale, with only the tips slightly golden.
7. Leave to cool for 5 minutes on the tray (they break when hot), and then gently roll them in the sugar while still warm.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 3 weeks; they become even more tender after 2 days. Variation: swap the almonds for ground hazelnuts. Common mistake: kneading for a long time with warm hands; the dough turns greasy and the crescents crack.



Vanilla almond crescents

Photo: Marijakes / Pixabay

Vanilla and chocolate pinwheels

Makes about 36 biscuits · Preparation: 35 min + 1 hr 20 min chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–12 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Two doughs, one pale and one chocolate, rolled up together. Every slice shows a different spiral.

INGREDIENTS

- 150 g unsalted butter, softened
- 100 g icing sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 pinch of salt
- 250 g plain flour
- 15 g unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 tbsp milk, plus a little extra for brushing

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the icing sugar for 2 minutes. Add the egg, vanilla and salt and beat until smooth.
2. Add the flour and mix until a dough forms. Weigh it and divide into two equal halves.
3. Add the cocoa and milk to one of the halves and knead until the colour is even.

4. Wrap both doughs in cling film and chill in the fridge for 20 minutes.
5. Roll out each dough between two sheets of baking parchment into a rectangle of 20 × 25 cm, about 4 mm thick.
6. Peel the top sheet of parchment off both doughs. Brush the pale dough with a little milk and flip the chocolate dough on top, using the parchment to help. Peel off that parchment and trim the edges with a knife.
7. Roll up very tightly from the longer side, using the bottom parchment to help. Wrap the log in cling film and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.
8. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
9. Cut the log into 6 mm slices and bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until the pale part is golden at the edges.
10. Leave on the tray for 5 minutes and then move to the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 2 weeks. The raw log keeps for 3 months in the freezer. Common mistake: if the doughs separate when you slice, there was not enough milk to stick them together or the log was not rolled tightly enough. Variation: before chilling, roll the log in granulated sugar for a sparkling edge.

Coconut rocks

Makes about 20 rocks · Preparation: 15 min + 10 min resting · Oven: 170 °C (fan 150 °C, gas mark 3), 15–18 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: egg · Gluten-free

Little mounds of coconut, golden at the tips and moist inside. They are made in a single bowl, with no flour or butter.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 egg whites (about 70 g)
- 120 g caster sugar
- 1 pinch of salt
- Zest of ½ lemon
- 180 g desiccated coconut

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 170 °C (fan 150 °C, gas mark 3) and line a baking tray with baking parchment.
2. In a bowl, stir the egg whites with a fork for 30 seconds, only until frothy (there is no need to whisk to stiff peaks).
3. Add the sugar, salt and lemon zest and stir. Add the coconut and mix well.
4. Leave to rest for 10 minutes, so the coconut absorbs the moisture.

5. With wet hands, shape pyramid-shaped mounds of about 25 g and place them on the tray 3 cm apart.
6. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, until the tips and base are golden.
7. Leave to cool completely on the tray before lifting them off.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 1 week. Variation: once cool, dip the base in 80 g melted chocolate and leave to set on baking parchment. Common mistake: mounds that fall apart mean there is too little egg white; add 1 tbsp more egg white.



Coconut rocks

Photo: 2497381 / Pixabay

Ginger and spice

Ginger, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg: these are the spices that most remind us of Christmas. In this chapter you will find gingerbread biscuits to cut out and decorate, a simple gingerbread house, and other aromatic biscuits, some crisp and some soft.

First gingerbread biscuits

Makes 24 biscuits (7–8 cm cutter) · Preparation: 20 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4), 8–10 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

The ideal recipe to start with: a dark, fragrant dough that rolls out well and gives gingerbread people, stars and trees ready to decorate. It takes about 20 minutes of work, plus 1 hour of chilling.

INGREDIENTS

- 350 g plain flour, plus a little extra for the cutters
- 150 g soft dark brown sugar
- 2 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp ground cloves
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1 pinch of salt
- 115 g unsalted butter, softened
- 1 egg (medium)
- 120 g black treacle (about 6 tbsp) or dark honey
- To decorate: royal icing or simple icing (chapter 7)

METHOD

1. In a large bowl, mix the flour, brown sugar, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, bicarbonate of soda and salt. Break

up any lumps of sugar with your fingers.

2. In another bowl, beat the butter, egg and treacle for 1 minute. It may look curdled: that is normal.
3. Add the wet mixture to the dry. Stir with a spoon and, when that gets difficult, knead with your hands until you have a smooth dough. If it crumbles, add 1 tbsp milk.
4. Divide the dough into two discs, wrap them in cling film and leave to rest in the fridge for at least 1 hour.
5. Preheat the oven to 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
6. Roll out one disc at a time between two sheets of baking parchment, to a thickness of 4 to 5 mm.
7. Cut out the biscuits with your favourite cutters and move them to the tray, leaving 2 cm between them. Gather the offcuts and roll them out once more.
8. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes: the edges become firm and the centre still gives a little when touched. At 8 minutes they are soft; at 10, crisper.
9. Leave on the tray for 5 minutes, move to the wire rack and leave to cool completely before decorating with icing.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 3 weeks; with dry icing, 2 weeks. The raw dough keeps for 3 months in the freezer. Variation: to hang them

on the tree, make a hole in each biscuit with a straw before they go in the oven. Common mistake: overbaking; the dark colour of the dough is deceptive, so go by the time and by touch.

Simple gingerbread house

Makes 1 little house (base about 15 × 10 cm) and 10 biscuits from the offcuts · Preparation: 1 hr + 30 min chilling + 3 hr drying · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 12–15 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

A small house, with straight walls and a pitched roof, designed for anyone who has never made one. The dough is firmer than the one for the biscuits, so that it can carry the weight of the roof.

INGREDIENTS

- 150 g unsalted butter
- 150 g honey
- 200 g soft dark brown sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 500 g plain flour
- 1 tbsp ground ginger
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground cloves
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1 pinch of salt
- To stick it together: 2 pasteurised egg whites (about 70 g), 450 g icing sugar, sifted, and 1 tsp lemon juice
- To decorate: almonds, boiled sweets, icing sugar, small biscuits

TEMPLATES (CUT THEM OUT OF CARD OR THICK PAPER)

- Side walls: 2 rectangles of 15 × 10 cm.
- Front and back: 2 pieces 10 cm wide; the sides are 10 cm high and the top forms a point, 17 cm high in total at the centre.
- Roof: 2 rectangles of 17 × 11 cm.

METHOD

1. In a saucepan over a low heat, warm the butter, honey and brown sugar, stirring, until the butter melts and the mixture is smooth. Do not let it boil. Leave to cool for 10 minutes.
2. In a large bowl, mix the flour, spices, bicarbonate of soda and salt.
3. Add the egg to the mixture in the saucepan and stir well. Pour over the flour and mix until you have a firm dough. Wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4).
5. Roll out the dough directly on sheets of baking parchment, 5 mm thick. Place the templates on top and cut around them with a sharp knife. Remove the excess dough without touching the pieces, and slide the parchment onto the baking tray.

6. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, until the pieces are firm and darker at the edges. With the offcuts, cut out small biscuits and bake them for 8 to 10 minutes.
7. As soon as you take them out of the oven, place the templates back on the still-hot pieces and trim the edges with the knife so they are perfectly straight. Leave to cool completely on the tray: the pieces harden as they cool.
8. For the "glue", beat the egg whites with the icing sugar and lemon juice for 5 to 7 minutes, until thick, white and forming stiff peaks. Put it in a piping bag, or in a freezer bag with a small corner snipped off.
9. Assemble the house on a board or a lined piece of card. Pipe a line of icing along the base and the sides of one side wall and one front, press them together at a right angle and hold for 1 to 2 minutes. Prop them up with jars or tins. Repeat with the other two walls. The side walls sit on the outside of the front and back.
10. Leave to dry for 1 hour. Then pipe icing along the top edges and stick on the two roof pieces, holding for 2 minutes. Add a line of icing along the ridge.
11. Leave to dry for at least 2 hours before decorating. Stick on the decorations with dots of icing and dust icing sugar around the house, like snow.

Warning: the icing contains raw egg whites. Always use pasteurised egg whites (sold in cartons, in the egg section), especially if the house will be eaten by pregnant women, small children, elderly people or people with a weakened immune system.

Storage: as an ornament, it lasts about 4 weeks in a dry place, away from steam. For eating, it is best in the first week (it hardens over time). Common mistake: assembling with the pieces still warm or with icing that is too runny; the walls slide. Wait for them to cool and thicken the icing with more icing sugar.



Simple gingerbread house, decorated with royal icing

Photo: Ksenia Yakovleva / Unsplash

Spiced crackle biscuits

Makes about 26 biscuits · Preparation: 15 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–11 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Balls rolled in sugar which open into shiny cracks in the oven. They are soft and very aromatic, and need no cutters.

INGREDIENTS

- 170 g unsalted butter, melted and lukewarm
- 200 g soft dark brown sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 60 g black treacle or dark honey
- 280 g plain flour
- 1½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground cloves
- ¼ tsp salt
- For rolling: 4 tbsp caster sugar

METHOD

1. In a bowl, whisk the butter, brown sugar, egg and treacle until smooth.

2. In another bowl, mix the flour, bicarbonate of soda, spices and salt. Add to the wet mixture and stir until you have a soft dough.
3. Cover and chill in the fridge for 1 hour, until the dough is firm enough to shape into balls.
4. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
5. Shape into 25 g balls and roll them in the sugar. Place on the tray 5 cm apart.
6. Bake for 10 to 11 minutes, until the surface cracks and the edges are firm. The centre should stay soft.
7. Leave on the tray for 5 minutes and then move to the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 1 week; they stay soft. Variation: roll the balls first in sugar and then in icing sugar, for cracks as white as snow. Common mistake: balls bigger than 25 g stay raw in the middle.

Honey, spice and orange biscuits

Makes about 30 biscuits · Preparation: 20 min + 30 min chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–12 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Round, soft biscuits with honey, aniseed and orange zest, topped with a thin orange glaze. They are reminiscent of Portuguese broas, but lighter.

INGREDIENTS

- 100 g unsalted butter
- 100 g honey
- 80 g soft light brown sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- Zest of 1 orange
- 300 g plain flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- ½ tsp ground aniseed
- 1 pinch of salt
- For the glaze: 100 g icing sugar and 1½ tbsp orange juice

METHOD

1. In a saucepan over a low heat, melt the butter with the honey and brown sugar, stirring. Leave to cool for 15 minutes.
2. Add the egg and orange zest and stir well.
3. In a bowl, mix the flour, baking powder, spices and salt. Add the mixture from the saucepan and stir until you have a soft dough. Cover and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
5. Shape into 20 g balls and place them on the tray 4 cm apart. Flatten them slightly with your fingers.
6. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until golden and firm at the edges.
7. Leave to cool on the wire rack. Mix the icing sugar with the orange juice and brush over the biscuits while still warm: the glaze will be thin and transparent. Leave to set for 1 hour.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 2 weeks. They become softer and more aromatic from the second day. Variation: swap the aniseed for ½ tsp ground ginger.

Soft ginger chocolate biscuits

Makes about 24 biscuits · Preparation: 20 min + 30 min chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–11 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Dark cocoa and ginger biscuits, with chunks of chocolate that melt in the oven. For anyone who thinks chocolate is a Christmas spice too.

INGREDIENTS

- 125 g unsalted butter, softened
- 150 g soft dark brown sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 60 g honey
- 250 g plain flour
- 30 g unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 2 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 pinch of salt
- 100 g baking chocolate, chopped

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the brown sugar for 2 minutes. Add the egg and honey and beat until smooth.

2. In another bowl, mix the flour, cocoa, bicarbonate of soda, spices and salt. Add to the butter mixture and stir until a dough forms.
3. Add the chopped chocolate. Cover and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
5. Shape into 30 g balls and place them on the tray 5 cm apart. Flatten them slightly.
6. Bake for 10 to 11 minutes. With the cocoa it is hard to judge by colour: they are ready when the edges are firm and the centre still gives when touched.
7. Leave on the tray for 5 minutes and then move to the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 1 week. Variation: add 40 g chopped crystallised ginger in place of half the chocolate. Common mistake: waiting for them to go hard in the oven; they turn dry as they cool.

Cinnamon stars

Makes about 30 stars (5 cm cutter) · Preparation: 40 min + 30 min chilling · Oven: 150 °C (fan 130 °C, gas mark 2), 12–15 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: egg, tree nuts · Gluten-free

Stars from the German tradition, made with just almonds, egg whites and cinnamon, topped with white meringue. They are soft inside and contain no flour.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 egg whites (about 70 g)
- 200 g icing sugar, sifted
- 250 g ground almonds, plus a little extra for rolling out
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- Zest of ½ lemon

METHOD

1. Whisk the egg whites to stiff peaks. Add the icing sugar a little at a time and whisk for another 3 to 4 minutes, until you have a thick, glossy meringue.
2. Take 4 tbsp of the meringue and put it in a small bowl, covered: this is the topping.
3. Add the ground almonds, cinnamon and lemon zest to the rest of the meringue and stir with the spatula until you have a sticky dough. Wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.

4. Preheat the oven to 150 °C (fan 130 °C, gas mark 2) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
5. Dust the worktop with ground almonds and roll out the dough between two sheets of cling film, 7 to 8 mm thick.
6. Cut out stars, dipping the cutter in cold water before each cut so the dough does not stick. Place them on the tray.
7. With the back of a teaspoon or a brush, spread a thin layer of topping over each star, all the way to the points.
8. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes. The topping should stay white and dry; if it starts to turn golden, lower the oven by 10 °C.
9. Leave to cool completely on the tray.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 3 weeks; they are best after 2 or 3 days. The egg whites are cooked in the oven; anyone who wants extra safety (pregnant women, small children, elderly people) can use pasteurised egg whites. Common mistake: a dough so sticky that it cannot be rolled; add 1 to 2 tbsp ground almonds.



Cinnamon stars with meringue topping

Photo: LUM3N / Pixabay

Swedish-style thin spice biscuits

Makes about 50 small biscuits · Preparation: 30 min + overnight chilling · Oven: 200 °C (fan 180 °C, gas mark 6), 5–6 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, milk

In Sweden they are called pepparkakor: very thin, crisp biscuits flavoured with orange and cloves. With a hole punched in them, they are perfect for hanging on the Christmas tree.

INGREDIENTS

- 100 g unsalted butter
- 100 g caster sugar
- 60 g honey (3 tbsp)
- 2 tbsp water
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- ½ tsp ground cloves
- Zest of ½ orange
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 250 g plain flour, plus a little extra for rolling out

METHOD

1. In a saucepan, combine the butter, sugar, honey, water and spices. Heat over a medium heat, stirring, until it comes to the boil. Switch off at once.

2. Leave to cool for 15 minutes and add the orange zest and bicarbonate of soda (the mixture will foam).
3. Add the flour and stir until you have a smooth, soft dough. Wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge overnight.
4. Preheat the oven to 200 °C (fan 180 °C, gas mark 6) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
5. Roll out small portions of dough on a lightly floured worktop, as thin as you can: 2 to 3 mm. Keep the rest in the cold while you work.
6. Cut out hearts, stars or gingerbread people. To hang them, make a hole with a straw.
7. Bake for 5 to 6 minutes, without leaving the oven: they turn golden brown and go from there to burnt in a minute.
8. Leave to cool for 2 minutes on the tray and then move to the wire rack. They become crisp as they cool.

Storage: in a tightly sealed tin, up to 4 weeks. Hung on the tree, they soften in the humidity after a few days and are only good as decorations. Variation: add ½ tsp ground cardamom to the spices. Common mistake: dough that is too thick; these biscuits only turn crisp if they are thin.

Filled and decorated biscuits

These biscuits take a little more time, but they are the ones that make people ask, "Did you really make these yourself?" There are sugar windows that glow in the light, Linzer biscuits with jam, chocolate sandwiches, stars decorated with icing, and Christmas trees made of stacked stars.

Stained-glass biscuits

Makes about 20 biscuits (8 cm cutter) · Preparation: 40 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4), 9–11 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Biscuits with a window of melted boiled sweet in the middle, which glows like stained glass when the light hits it. Hung on the tree or by a window, they are enchanting.

INGREDIENTS

- 115 g unsalted butter, softened
- 100 g caster sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 pinch of salt
- 225 g plain flour
- 100 g clear hard boiled sweets, in assorted colours (about 20)

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the sugar for 2 minutes. Add the egg, vanilla and salt and beat until smooth.
2. Add the flour and mix until a dough forms. Make two discs, wrap them in cling film and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.
3. Sort the sweets by colour and put each colour in a freezer bag. Seal and crush with the rolling pin until in

little pieces (not powder).

4. Preheat the oven to 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment. The parchment is essential: melted sweet sticks to any other surface.
5. Roll out the dough to 5 mm thick and cut out 8 cm shapes (stars, trees, circles). With a small cutter, 3 to 4 cm, cut a window in the centre of each one.
6. Move the biscuits to the tray. To hang them, make a hole near the top with a straw.
7. Fill each window with crushed sweet up to the level of the dough, without letting any pieces fall on top of the biscuit.
8. Bake for 9 to 11 minutes, until the sweet has melted and filled the window and the edges are light golden.
9. Leave to cool completely on the tray, at least 20 minutes, before touching. The stained glass hardens as it cools.

Warning: melted sweet gets very hot and burns. Children can fill the windows while the dough is still raw; an adult puts the tray in and takes it out of the oven, and the biscuits are only touched once they are cold.

Storage: in a tightly sealed tin, up to 1 week. Humidity makes the stained glass sticky, so do not keep them in the fridge. Common mistake: windows with bubbles or gaps mean too little sweet; fill right up to the level of the dough.

Raspberry Linzer biscuits

Makes about 20 sandwich biscuits (6 cm cutter) · Preparation: 45 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4), 9–11 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Two almond biscuits joined by raspberry jam, with a small star or heart window in the top one. They come from the Austrian tradition and are among the prettiest in a gift box.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g plain flour
- 100 g ground almonds
- 80 g icing sugar
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 1 pinch of salt
- 150 g unsalted butter, cold, cubed
- 1 egg yolk
- Zest of ½ lemon
- 150 g seedless raspberry jam (or strawberry)
- Icing sugar for dusting

METHOD

1. In a bowl, mix the flour, almonds, icing sugar, cinnamon and salt.

2. Add the butter and rub it in with your fingertips until it looks like coarse sand. Add the yolk and lemon zest and knead quickly until a dough forms.
3. Make two discs, wrap them in cling film and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.
4. Preheat the oven to 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
5. Roll out the dough between two sheets of baking parchment, 3 mm thick. Cut out 6 cm circles (an even number).
6. In half of the circles, cut a small 2 cm window in the centre (star or heart).
7. Bake for 9 to 11 minutes, until the edges are light golden. The biscuits with windows bake a little faster: keep an eye on them.
8. Leave to cool completely on the wire rack.
9. Dust the biscuits with windows with icing sugar. Spread each whole biscuit with 1 tsp of jam, leaving 5 mm free at the edge, and top with a biscuit with a window.

Storage: unfilled biscuits keep for 2 weeks in a tin; once filled they soften and are good for 3 to 4 days. Assemble them the day before giving or serving. Variation: use apricot or bitter orange jam (marmalade). Common mistake: dusting the sugar after assembling; the sugar falls on the jam and the window loses its shine.



Linzer biscuits with raspberry jam

Photo: amirali mirhashemian / Unsplash

Chocolate sandwich biscuits with chocolate orange cream

Makes about 22 sandwiches (5 cm cutter) · Preparation: 45 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 9–10 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Thin cocoa biscuits joined by a chocolate cream with orange zest. Chocolate and orange is a classic Christmas combination.

INGREDIENTS

- 130 g unsalted butter, softened
- 100 g icing sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 1 pinch of salt
- 200 g plain flour
- 30 g unsweetened cocoa powder
- For the cream: 100 g baking chocolate, 60 ml double cream and the zest of ½ orange

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the icing sugar for 2 minutes. Add the egg and salt and beat until smooth.
2. Add the flour and cocoa, sifted together, and mix until a dough forms. Make two discs, wrap them and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.

3. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
4. Roll out the dough 3 to 4 mm thick and cut out 5 cm circles or stars (an even number).
5. Bake for 9 to 10 minutes. They are ready when the surface turns matt and the edges feel firm to the touch.
6. Leave to cool completely on the wire rack.
7. For the cream, chop the chocolate and put it in a bowl. Heat the cream until small bubbles appear at the edges and pour it over the chocolate. Wait 2 minutes and stir until smooth. Add the orange zest.
8. Leave the cream to cool for 30 to 40 minutes, until it has the consistency of a spread.
9. Spread half of the biscuits with 1 tsp of cream and top with the remaining ones, pressing down gently.

Storage: because they contain cream, keep them in the fridge, in a closed box, for up to 5 days. Take them out 15 minutes before serving. Variation: swap the orange zest for ¼ tsp cinnamon. Common mistake: spreading the cream while still liquid; it runs down the sides. Wait for it to thicken.

Stars decorated with royal icing

Makes about 30 stars (7 cm cutter) · Preparation: 1 hr 30 min + 1 hr chilling + 8 hr drying · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–12 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

A dough with no raising agent, which holds its shape in the oven and is ideal for decorating with icing. The decorating techniques are explained in detail in chapter 7.

INGREDIENTS

- 175 g unsalted butter, softened
- 150 g icing sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- Zest of 1 lemon or 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 pinch of salt
- 300 g plain flour
- For the icing: 1 pasteurised egg white (about 35 g), 200 g icing sugar, sifted, ½ tsp lemon juice and food colouring (optional)

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the icing sugar for 2 minutes. Add the egg, zest and salt and beat until smooth.
2. Add the flour and mix until a dough forms. Make two discs, wrap them and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.

3. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
4. Roll out the dough 5 mm thick and cut out the stars. Place them on the tray and put it in the freezer for 10 minutes: the points stay well defined.
5. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until the edges are lightly golden. Leave to cool completely.
6. For the icing, beat the egg white with the icing sugar and lemon juice for 5 minutes, until it forms stiff peaks. Set aside a third for the outlines.
7. Add water to the rest of the icing, a drop at a time, until a line drawn across the surface with a spoon disappears in about 10 seconds. This is the flooding consistency. Tint with food colouring, if you like.
8. With the stiff icing in a bag with a fine nozzle, pipe an outline around each star, 2 mm from the edge. Leave to dry for 10 minutes.
9. Fill the inside with the flooding icing and spread it to the corners with a cocktail stick, popping any bubbles.
10. For white dots or lines, use the stiff icing on top of the flooding icing, either once it has dried (after 1 hour) or while still wet, so that they come out smooth.
11. Leave to dry in the air, in a dry place, for 8 hours or overnight, before stacking or packing.

Warning: royal icing contains raw egg white. Use pasteurised egg white, especially if the biscuits are for pregnant women, small children, elderly people or people with a weakened immune system. In chapter 7 there is an egg-free alternative.

Storage: once the icing has dried, keep in a tin, in layers separated by baking parchment, for up to 2 weeks. Do not put them in the fridge: the icing turns sticky and the colours run. Variation: sprinkle granulated sugar over the wet icing for a frosted effect.

Thumbprint biscuits with fig jam

Makes about 28 biscuits · Preparation: 30 min · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 12–14 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Little balls rolled in walnuts, with a hollow pressed in with a finger and filled with fig jam. Children love making the "thumbprint".

INGREDIENTS

- 120 g unsalted butter, softened
- 60 g caster sugar
- 1 egg (medium), yolk separated from white
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- 1 pinch of salt
- 200 g plain flour
- 60 g walnuts, chopped very finely
- 120 g fig jam (or apricot)

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
2. Beat the butter with the sugar for 2 minutes. Add the yolk, vanilla and salt and beat until smooth.
3. Add the flour and mix until you have a soft dough that does not stick to your hands.

4. Lightly beat the egg white with a fork in a shallow dish. Put the walnuts in another dish.
5. Shape into 15 g balls, dip them in the egg white and then in the walnuts. Place on the tray 3 cm apart.
6. With your thumb or the handle of a wooden spoon, press a hollow into the centre of each ball, 1 cm deep. If the edge cracks, press it together with your fingers.
7. Fill each hollow with ½ tsp of jam.
8. Bake for 12 to 14 minutes, until the base is light golden.
9. Leave on the tray for 5 minutes (the jam is very hot) and then move to the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 1 week. Nut-free variation: roll the balls in sugar instead of walnuts. Common mistake: overfilling the hollows; the jam boils and runs down the biscuit.



Thumbprint biscuits with fig jam

Photo: Einladung_zum_Essen / Pixabay

Stacked star Christmas trees

Makes 6 trees with 6 tiers · Preparation: 1 hr 15 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 6–12 min depending on size · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Stars in six sizes, stacked from the largest to the smallest and turned a little on top of one another, make a tree with sugar "snow". Wrapped in cellophane, they make a lovely gift.

INGREDIENTS

- 150 g unsalted butter, softened
- 120 g caster sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 1 tbsp honey
- Zest of 1 orange
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 pinch of salt
- 300 g plain flour
- To stick and decorate: 150 g icing sugar, 1½ to 2 tbsp lemon juice, icing sugar for dusting and small sugar pearls (optional)
- Equipment: a set of 6 star cutters, 3 to 10 cm

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the sugar for 2 minutes. Add the egg, honey, orange zest, cinnamon and salt and beat until smooth.
2. Add the flour and mix until a dough forms. Make two discs, wrap them and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.
3. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line three baking trays with baking parchment.
4. Roll out the dough 5 mm thick. Cut out 6 stars of each size.
5. Place the stars on the trays separated by size: the small ones on one, the medium ones on another and the large ones on another. That way they bake evenly.
6. Bake the small ones for 6 to 8 minutes, the medium ones for 8 to 10 and the large ones for 10 to 12, until the edges are light golden. Leave to cool completely.
7. Mix the icing sugar with the lemon juice, a spoonful at a time, until you have a thick icing that does not run off the spoon.
8. Assemble each tree: put a large star on a plate, a dot of icing in the centre, and the next star on top, turned so that its points sit between the points of the one below. Continue up to the smallest.

9. With a spoon, let a thread of icing drip over the points of each tier, like snow. Add the sugar pearls, if you like.
10. Leave to dry for 2 hours and dust with icing sugar before serving or wrapping.

Storage: assembled, they keep for 1 week in a cool, dry place, covered or wrapped in cellophane. Variation: if you do not have six cutters, use three sizes and make two stars of each, turning them against each other. Common mistake: stacking the stars while still warm; the tree leans.

Butter sticks with chocolate and pine nuts

Makes about 30 sticks · Preparation: 40 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 11–13 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Biscuit sticks with half dipped in chocolate and covered with toasted pine nuts. They look lovely standing up in a glass or a jar.

INGREDIENTS

- 125 g unsalted butter, softened
- 80 g caster sugar
- 1 egg (medium)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 pinch of salt
- 250 g plain flour
- 150 g baking chocolate
- 50 g pine nuts (or chopped walnuts)

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the sugar for 2 minutes. Add the egg, vanilla and salt and beat until smooth.
2. Add the flour and mix until a dough forms. Shape into a flat rectangle, wrap and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.
3. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.

4. Roll out the dough into a rectangle 6 mm thick. With a knife and a ruler, cut strips of 10 × 2 cm.
5. Place on the tray 2 cm apart and bake for 11 to 13 minutes, until the edges are golden. Leave to cool completely.
6. In a dry frying pan over a medium heat, toast the pine nuts for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring constantly, until golden. Move to a plate and chop roughly.
7. Melt the chocolate in a bain-marie (a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water) or in the microwave in 30-second bursts, stirring between each.
8. Dip half of each stick in the chocolate, let the excess drip off and place on baking parchment. Sprinkle straight away with the pine nuts.
9. Leave the chocolate to set for 1 hour in a cool place.

Storage: in a sealed tin, in layers separated by baking parchment, up to 2 weeks, in a cool place. Variation: use white chocolate and coloured Christmas sprinkles. Common mistake: toasting the pine nuts and walking away from the hob; they burn in seconds.

Portuguese and world traditions

In Portugal, Christmas smells of honey, aniseed, cinnamon and olive oil. This chapter begins with *broas* (little spiced cakes), olive oil biscuits and *raivas* (twisted cinnamon biscuits), and then travels to the Christmas biscuits of Germany, Belgium, Italy and other countries.

Portuguese honey and spice biscuits (*broas de mel*)

Makes about 25 broas · Preparation: 30 min + 30 min resting · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 15–18 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Dark broas made with honey, olive oil and spices are among the oldest sweets on Portuguese Christmas tables. They are firm outside, soft inside, and get better from day to day.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g honey
- 150 g soft dark brown sugar
- 100 ml olive oil
- 50 g unsalted butter
- 1 egg (medium)
- Zest of 1 orange
- 500 g plain flour
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground aniseed
- ½ tsp ground cloves
- 1 pinch of salt

- 50 g chopped almonds or walnuts
- For brushing: 1 egg yolk beaten with 1 tbsp water

METHOD

1. In a saucepan over a low heat, warm the honey, brown sugar, olive oil and butter, stirring, until the butter melts. Do not let it boil. Leave to cool for 10 minutes.
2. In a large bowl, mix the flour, bicarbonate of soda, spices, salt and nuts.
3. Add the egg and orange zest to the mixture in the saucepan and stir. Pour over the flour and mix, first with a spoon and then with your hands, until you have a soft dough that can be shaped without sticking.
4. Cover the bowl and leave to rest for 30 minutes at room temperature (or overnight in the fridge).
5. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
6. Take portions of 40 g, shape them into ovals and flatten until they are 1.5 cm high. Place on the tray 3 cm apart.
7. Brush with the beaten yolk.
8. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, until golden brown and firm on the outside. Inside they should stay soft.
9. Leave to cool completely on the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 3 weeks. They become softer and tastier from the second day. Variation: add 50 g chopped mixed candied peel to the dough. Common mistake: broas that are too thick stay raw inside; keep to the height of 1.5 cm.

Portuguese sweet potato and almond broas (*broas castelares*)

Makes about 30 broas · Preparation: 1 hr + cooling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 20–25 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Golden broas of sweet potato, almond, cinnamon and orange, typical of the Portuguese Christmas Eve table. They are moist and tender inside, with a flavour reminiscent of chestnut.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g sweet potato (weight once cooked and peeled; about 700 g raw)
- 250 g caster sugar
- 100 g unsalted butter
- 1 egg (medium)
- Zest of 1 orange
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 150 g ground almonds
- 250 g plain flour, plus a little extra for your hands
- For brushing: 1 egg yolk beaten with 1 tbsp water

METHOD

1. Wash the sweet potatoes and boil them whole, in their skins, in boiling water for 30 to 40 minutes, until a fork

goes in without resistance. Drain, peel and mash until smooth. Weigh out 500 g.

2. In a saucepan, combine the mash, sugar and butter. Cook over a low heat for 5 to 8 minutes, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the mixture thickens and begins to come away from the bottom of the pan.
3. Transfer to a large bowl and leave to cool completely (at least 1 hour).
4. Add the egg, orange zest, cinnamon and almonds and stir well. Add the flour a little at a time, until you have a soft dough that can be shaped with floured hands.
5. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
6. With floured hands, shape 40 g portions into ovals and place them on the tray 3 cm apart.
7. Brush with the beaten yolk.
8. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until well golden on top and firm to the touch.
9. Leave to cool on the wire rack.

Storage: because they are moist, they last less long than other biscuits: up to 1 week in a closed box, in a cool place. They freeze well for up to 2 months. Common mistake: adding the flour to the mash

while still hot; the dough turns sticky and needs too much flour, and the broas turn out heavy.

Portuguese olive oil and aniseed biscuits (*biscoitos de azeite*)

Makes about 40 biscuits · Preparation: 40 min · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 15–18 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg

Dry biscuits shaped into rings or "S" shapes, flavoured with olive oil, aniseed and lemon, as they are made in many country homes in Portugal. They contain no butter or milk.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 eggs (medium)
- 200 g caster sugar
- 150 ml olive oil
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1 tbsp aniseed
- 1 pinch of salt
- 500 g plain flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 2 to 4 tbsp water, if needed

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
2. In a large bowl, beat the eggs with the sugar for 2 minutes. Add the olive oil, lemon zest, aniseed and salt

and stir well.

3. Mix the flour with the baking powder and add it a little at a time, kneading with your hands, until you have a soft dough that does not stick. If it is dry and crumbly, add water, a spoonful at a time.
4. Take portions of 20 g. Roll each one into a rope 12 cm long and 1 cm thick, and shape it into a ring (joining the ends) or an "S".
5. Place on the tray 2 cm apart.
6. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, until the base is golden. The tops stay pale.
7. Leave to cool on the wire rack: they turn crisp.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 4 weeks. Variation: swap the aniseed for 1 tsp cinnamon and use orange zest. Common mistake: ropes that are too thick stay soft inside and go soft in the tin.



Portuguese olive oil and aniseed biscuits

Photo: Maria Kovalets / Unsplash

Portuguese cinnamon twists (*raivas de canela*)

Makes about 35 raivas · Preparation: 40 min + 30 min chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 12–15 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Cinnamon biscuits with twisted, all-different shapes: they say the name comes from the "angry" look they end up with (raiva means "rage"). No two are alike, and that is the charm.

INGREDIENTS

- 60 g unsalted butter, softened
- 200 g caster sugar
- 2 eggs (medium)
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 1 pinch of salt
- 250 g plain flour, plus a little extra for your hands

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the sugar for 1 minute. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well between each.
2. Add the cinnamon and salt. Add the flour and stir until you have a firm, slightly sticky dough. Cover and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.
3. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.

4. With floured hands, take portions of 15 g. Roll each one into a thin rope about 20 cm long and 5 mm thick.
5. Let each rope drop onto the tray in loops and twists, freely, forming a little tangle about 6 cm across.
6. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, until golden and dry to the touch.
7. Leave to cool on the wire rack.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 4 weeks. Variation: sprinkle with a little cinnamon sugar before they go in the oven. Common mistake: thick ropes give raivas that are soft inside; they should be thin and crisp.

World traditions

Honey and almond Lebkuchen (Germany)

Makes about 20 biscuits · Preparation: 30 min + 1 hr chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–12 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Soft biscuits of honey, spices, almonds and candied orange peel, covered with chocolate. They are sold at every German Christmas market.

INGREDIENTS

- 100 g honey
- 75 g soft dark brown sugar
- 50 g unsalted butter
- 1 egg (medium)
- 200 g plain flour
- 100 g ground almonds
- 1 tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- ¼ tsp ground cloves
- ¼ tsp nutmeg

- 50 g candied orange peel (or mixed candied peel), finely chopped
- For the topping: 100 g baking chocolate

METHOD

1. In a saucepan over a low heat, melt the honey, brown sugar and butter, stirring. Leave to cool for 15 minutes and add the egg.
2. In a bowl, mix the flour, almonds, cocoa, bicarbonate of soda and spices. Add the mixture from the saucepan and the orange peel and stir until you have a sticky dough.
3. Cover and chill in the fridge for 1 hour.
4. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
5. With wet hands, shape 30 g balls and flatten them until they are 1 cm high. Place on the tray 4 cm apart.
6. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until firm at the edges and soft in the centre.
7. Leave to cool completely on the wire rack.
8. Melt the chocolate and cover the top of each biscuit with a teaspoon, smoothing with the back of the spoon. Leave to set for 1 hour.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 3 weeks. They become softer and tastier after 2 or 3 days. Variation: instead of chocolate, cover with 80 g icing sugar mixed with 1 tbsp lemon juice. Common mistake: baking until hard; Lebkuchen should stay soft.

Spiced speculoos (Belgium and the Netherlands)

Makes about 40 biscuits · Preparation: 30 min + overnight chilling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–12 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, milk

Thin, crisp biscuits of brown sugar and cinnamon, with a deep caramel flavour. They go very well with coffee.

INGREDIENTS

- 125 g unsalted butter, softened
- 150 g soft dark brown sugar
- 2 tbsp milk
- 250 g plain flour
- ½ tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- ¼ tsp ground cloves
- ¼ tsp ground ginger
- 1 pinch of salt
- To decorate (optional): flaked almonds

METHOD

1. Beat the butter with the brown sugar for 2 minutes. Add the milk and stir.
2. Add the flour, baking powder, spices and salt and knead until you have a smooth dough.

3. Wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge overnight: the spices develop more flavour.
4. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
5. Roll out the dough between two sheets of baking parchment, 3 mm thick. Cut out rectangles of 6 × 4 cm or other shapes. If you like, press 2 or 3 flaked almonds into each biscuit.
6. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until dark golden at the edges.
7. Leave to cool on the wire rack: they turn crisp.

Storage: in a tightly sealed tin, up to 4 weeks. Variation: for raised patterns, press a biscuit stamp or the bottom of a patterned glass into the dough before cutting. If you use almonds, write "tree nuts" on the label. Common mistake: thick dough gives soft biscuits that do not snap.

Walnut snowballs

Makes about 40 balls · Preparation: 30 min · Oven: 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4), 14–16 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, milk, tree nuts

Little balls of butter and walnut, rolled twice in icing sugar. There are similar versions in many countries: in Greece, Mexico and the United States. They contain no egg.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g unsalted butter, softened
- 50 g icing sugar, plus 100 g for coating
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 pinch of salt
- 250 g plain flour
- 120 g walnuts, chopped very finely

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 175 °C (fan 155 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
2. Beat the butter with the 50 g icing sugar, the vanilla and the salt for 2 minutes.
3. Add the flour and walnuts and mix until a dough forms. If it is too soft, chill in the fridge for 20 minutes.
4. Shape into 15 g balls (about 3 cm) and place on the tray 2 cm apart.

5. Bake for 14 to 16 minutes, until the base is light golden. The tops stay pale.
6. Leave to cool for 5 minutes on the tray and roll the balls, still warm, in the 100 g icing sugar.
7. When they are cold, roll them in icing sugar again: the second layer is white as snow.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 3 weeks. Variation: swap the walnuts for toasted, ground hazelnuts or almonds. Common mistake: rolling them in sugar straight out of the oven; when hot they fall apart and the sugar melts.



Walnut snowballs

Photo: Skyler Ewing / Unsplash

Almond and orange florentines

Makes about 20 florentines · Preparation: 30 min + 1 hr setting · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 8–10 min · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, milk, tree nuts

Thin, crisp biscuits of flaked almonds, honey and candied fruit, with the base covered in chocolate. They look like golden lace.

INGREDIENTS

- 50 g unsalted butter
- 60 g caster sugar
- 40 g honey (2 tbsp)
- 50 ml double cream
- 120 g flaked almonds
- 40 g chopped candied fruit (or dried cranberries)
- Zest of ½ orange
- 15 g plain flour (1 heaped tbsp)
- For the base: 100 g baking chocolate

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line two baking trays with baking parchment.
2. In a saucepan, combine the butter, sugar, honey and cream. Bring to a medium heat, stirring, and boil for 1 minute.

3. Turn off the heat and add the almonds, candied fruit, orange zest and flour. Stir well.
4. Place level teaspoonfuls on the tray, 8 cm apart: they spread a lot. No more than 8 per tray.
5. With the back of a wet spoon, flatten each mound until thin.
6. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes, until caramel golden, especially at the edges.
7. Leave to cool for 2 minutes. If you want perfectly round florentines, push the edges inwards with a round cutter while they are still soft.
8. Leave to cool completely on the tray, until crisp.
9. Melt the chocolate. Turn the florentines over and brush the base with chocolate. When it begins to set, make waves with a fork. Leave to set for 1 hour, chocolate side up.

> **Warning:** the sugar and honey mixture gets very hot and can burn. This recipe is for adults; children can help only by brushing on the chocolate, once the florentines are cold.

Storage: in a tightly sealed tin, in a cool, dry place, up to 1 week. In humid conditions they go soft. Common mistake: taking them out of the oven too soon; pale florentines do not snap. They should be caramel-coloured.

Almond and orange cantucci (Italy)

Makes about 35 cantucci · Preparation: 25 min + 10 min cooling · Oven: 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 25 min + 160 °C (fan 140 °C, gas mark 3), 10–12 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, tree nuts

Crunchy biscuits that go into the oven twice: first as a log, then as slices. They are excellent for dunking in coffee or in a glass of Port, and they keep for weeks.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 eggs (medium)
- 150 g caster sugar
- Zest of 1 orange
- 1 pinch of salt
- 250 g plain flour, plus a little extra for your hands
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 120 g whole almonds, skin on

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) and line a baking tray with baking parchment.
2. In a bowl, beat the eggs with the sugar, orange zest and salt for 1 minute.
3. Add the flour and baking powder and stir. Add the almonds and knead with floured hands until you have a sticky dough.

4. Divide in two and shape into two logs about 25 cm long and 4 cm wide. Place them on the tray, well apart.
5. Bake for 25 minutes, until golden and firm.
6. Take out of the oven, lower it to 160 °C (fan 140 °C, gas mark 3) and leave the logs to cool for 10 minutes.
7. With a serrated knife, cut the logs diagonally into slices 1 cm thick.
8. Lay the slices flat on the tray and bake for 10 to 12 minutes, turning them halfway, until dry and lightly golden.
9. Leave to cool on the wire rack: they harden as they cool.

Storage: in a sealed tin, up to 1 month. Variation: add 50 g chopped candied fruit or 1 tsp aniseed. Common mistake: cutting the logs when cold; they break. Cut them while warm, with a sawing motion.



Almond and orange cantucci

Photo: 27707 / Pixabay

Icing and decorating, step by step

Decorating biscuits is many people's favourite part, especially children's. You do not need an artist's hand: with two kinds of icing and half a dozen simple techniques, your biscuits will look lovely. Always do a test biscuit before decorating the rest.

Before you decorate

- The biscuits must be **completely cold**. On warm biscuits, the icing melts and runs.
- Have everything ready beforehand: bags of icing, cocktail sticks, damp kitchen paper for wiping the tips, and the decorations in small bowls.
- Always cover any icing you are not using with cling film pressed against the surface. It dries very quickly and forms a crust.
- Pick a dry day. In very humid weather, icing takes hours to dry.

Bags and nozzles

- **Freezer bag:** fill it halfway, seal it, push the icing into one corner and snip off a very small tip (1 to 2 mm). Always cut less than you think you need: you can make it bigger later.

- **Baking parchment cone:** cut a triangle, roll it into a cone and fold the top inwards. It is great for fine lines.
- **Piping bag with a No. 1 or 2 plain nozzle:** for anyone who wants very even lines.
- Between uses, stand the bag tip-down in a glass with damp kitchen paper at the bottom, so the tip does not dry out.

Royal icing

Decorates about 30 biscuits of 7 cm · Preparation: 10 min · No oven · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: egg · Gluten-free

The icing that dries hard and glossy. Use it for outlines, flooding, details and for sticking the gingerbread house together. The same recipe gives every consistency, with more or less water.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pasteurised egg white (about 35 g)
- 200 to 225 g icing sugar, sifted
- ½ tsp lemon juice
- Water, drop by drop
- Gel food colouring or natural colourings (see below)

METHOD

1. In a clean, dry, grease-free bowl, combine the egg white, 200 g icing sugar and the lemon juice.
2. Beat with an electric mixer on low speed until the sugar is mixed in, and then on medium speed for 5 to 7 minutes, until the icing is white, glossy and forms stiff peaks when you lift the beaters.
3. If it is still soft, add more icing sugar, one tablespoon at a time. This is the **stiff consistency**: use it for

sticking, for thick outlines and for flowers or raised details.

4. For the **outline consistency**, add water drop by drop to some of the icing, until the peak that forms when you lift the spoon bends slightly, like toothpaste.
5. For the **flooding consistency**, add more water until a line drawn across the surface disappears in about 10 seconds. Stir slowly, so as not to make bubbles.
6. To colour, divide the icing between bowls and add the colouring with the tip of a cocktail stick, little by little. Colours darken a little as they dry.

> **Warning:** royal icing contains raw egg white, which is not cooked. Always use pasteurised egg whites (sold in cartons, in the egg section), especially for pregnant women, small children, elderly people and people with a weakened immune system.

Storage: in a closed box, with cling film pressed against the icing, up to 3 days in the fridge. Beat it again before using. Egg-free alternative: swap the egg white for 2 tbsp (30 ml) of the water from a tin of cooked chickpeas (aquafaba) and beat in the same way; it dries a little more slowly. Common mistake: a bowl with grease on it stops the icing from becoming stiff.

Simple icing

Covers about 25 biscuits · Preparation: 5 min · No oven · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: none of the main ones (milk, if you use it)

Just icing sugar and a liquid. It does not dry as hard as royal icing, but it is the quickest, contains no egg and is perfect for children.

INGREDIENTS

- 150 g icing sugar, sifted
- 2 tbsp lemon juice, orange juice, milk or water

METHOD

1. Put the icing sugar in a bowl.
2. Add the liquid, half a spoonful at a time, stirring with a spoon, until smooth.
3. To cover the surface of biscuits, it should be as thick as yoghurt. To pipe lines with a bag, it should be thicker, like toothpaste: add more icing sugar.
4. Spread with the back of a spoon, dip the face of the biscuit into the icing, or use a bag with a small tip.
5. Leave to dry for 1 to 2 hours at room temperature.

Storage: iced biscuits last as long as each recipe says, but the icing stays a little sticky if you stack them; separate the layers with baking parchment. Variation: add ¼ tsp cinnamon or the zest of ½ lemon.

Common mistake: adding all the liquid at once; the icing becomes runny and drips off the biscuits.

Chocolate coating for dipping

Dips about 30 small biscuits · Preparation: 10 min · No oven · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: milk (depending on the chocolate)

Melted chocolate with a little butter, which turns glossy and sets quickly. Use it to dip half-biscuits, to cover Lebkuchen or to make stripes.

INGREDIENTS

- 150 g baking chocolate (dark, milk or white)
- 10 g unsalted butter (or 1 tsp sunflower oil)

METHOD

1. Chop the chocolate and put it in a microwave-safe bowl with the butter.
2. Heat in 30-second bursts, stirring well between each, until almost all of it has melted. The last pieces will melt from the heat as you stir. Alternatively, melt in a bain-marie (a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water), without letting the water boil or touch the bowl.
3. Leave to cool for 5 minutes: the chocolate should be warm, not hot.
4. Dip the biscuits, let the excess drip off by tapping gently on the rim of the bowl, and place on baking parchment.
5. Add the decorations (nuts, coloured sugar) while the chocolate is soft.

6. Leave to set for 1 hour in a cool place. Only use the fridge if the kitchen is warm, and for 15 minutes at most.

Storage: chocolate biscuits are kept in a tin, in a cool place, in layers separated by baking parchment. Common mistake: a drop of water in the chocolate makes it thick and grainy. Use bowls and spoons that are completely dry. White chocolate burns more quickly: heat it in 15-second bursts.



Decorating with royal icing: first the outline, then the flooding

Photo: JillWellington / Pixabay

Natural colours

Supermarket gel colourings give strong colours with very little product. If you prefer natural colours, these work well. They give softer shades and may add a little flavour, so use only small amounts:

Colour	What to use	How much (for 100 g of icing)
Pink to red	Raw or cooked beetroot juice	½ to 1 tsp (take out the same amount of water)
Yellow	Turmeric	1 small pinch
Orange	Turmeric + beetroot juice	1 pinch + a few drops
Green	Green tea powder (matcha)	¼ tsp
Brown	Unsweetened cocoa powder	1 to 2 tsp (add a few drops of water)
Golden beige	Cinnamon	¼ tsp

Simple techniques

1. Outlining and flooding

1. With outline icing, pipe a line 2 mm from the edge of the biscuit. Hold the bag slightly above the biscuit and let the thread of icing fall, instead of dragging it.
2. Wait 10 minutes.

3. Fill the inside with flooding icing, starting at the edges and finishing in the centre.
4. Spread it to the corners with a cocktail stick and pop any bubbles.
5. Shake the biscuit gently to smooth the surface.

2. Wet on wet

Right after flooding the biscuit, while the icing is still wet, make dots of another colour. They come out smooth, level with the base.

- **Hearts:** make a row of dots and drag a cocktail stick through the centre of all of them, in one movement.
- **Marbling:** make stripes of another colour and drag a cocktail stick through them in a zigzag, in the opposite direction.
- **Christmas jumper:** white and red stripes on a green background, pulled with the cocktail stick, give a knitted pattern.

3. Raised details

Once the flooding has dried for 1 hour, pipe on top with outline icing: dots, snowflakes, bows, buttons, faces on gingerbread people. The details stand out.

4. Sugar and decorations

Sprinkle granulated sugar, coloured sugar or sugar pearls over the icing while it is still wet. Wait 5 minutes and shake off the excess onto a sheet of paper, to use again.

5. Decorating with children

- Use simple icing, which contains no egg.
- Give each child a small bag with the tip already snipped and a bowl of decorations.
- Cover the table with baking parchment or wrapping paper.
- Choose large biscuits with simple shapes: circles, stars, trees.

Drying

- Royal icing needs **6 to 8 hours** (or overnight) to dry completely. Simple icing needs 1 to 2 hours.
- Leave to dry at room temperature, in a dry place, uncovered.
- Do not put iced biscuits in the fridge: the humidity makes the icing sticky and the colours run into one another.
- To tell whether it is dry, gently touch a corner: it should not give or stick.

Common mistakes and how to fix them

Problem	Why	How to fix it
The icing runs down the sides	It is too runny	Add icing sugar, one spoonful at a time
The bag gets blocked	Lumps of sugar or a dry tip	Always sift the sugar and store the bag with the tip on damp paper
Bubbles on the surface	Icing beaten hard after adding water	Stir slowly and pop the bubbles with a cocktail stick straight after flooding
The colours bleed into each other	The first colour was still wet, or there was humidity	Wait 1 hour between neighbouring colours and dry in a dry place
The icing will not dry	A humid day or icing that is too runny	Leave to dry for longer, near a window or a gentle radiator (not on top of it)
Dark spots in the icing	Butter from the biscuit has come through into the icing	Decorate only completely cold biscuits that have been baked properly
Wobbly lines	The bag is too close to the biscuit	Lift the bag 1 cm and let the thread fall, guiding it

Biscuits to give and a baking plan

A box of homemade biscuits is a gift that people remember for a long time. In this chapter you will find ideas for packing, a table showing how long each biscuit keeps, a jar mix to give as a present, and a plan for organising your December baking.

Golden rules for packing

1. **Completely cold biscuits.** Packed while still warm, they create steam and go soft.
2. **Icing fully dry.** Royal icing needs 8 hours; simple icing, 2 hours.
3. **One type per package, or keep them separate.** Crisp and soft biscuits should not go together: the crisp ones go soft. Spiced biscuits pass their smell on to the others.
4. **The heaviest at the bottom.** Broas and olive oil biscuits at the bottom, thin and decorated biscuits on top.
5. **Baking parchment between layers,** especially for biscuits with icing or chocolate.
6. **Biscuits with cream or ganache are not for giving to keep:** they are to be eaten within a few days and kept in the fridge. Tell the person who receives them.

Packing ideas

- **Glass jars with lids.** Great for small, firm biscuits (snowballs, raivas, cantucci, crescents). Put a square of fabric over the lid and tie it with string.
- **Tins.** The best for keeping biscuits fresh. Save the biscuit tins you buy through the year and line them with baking parchment.
- **Cardboard boxes** lined with baking parchment or paper cases, one biscuit in each. Good for decorated biscuits, which cannot be piled on top of one another.
- **Cellophane bags** closed with ribbon. Good for 3 to 5 biscuits, for colleagues, teachers or neighbours. Seal them well, so no air gets in.
- **Stacked star trees** (chapter 5) on a cardboard plate, wrapped in cellophane and tied at the top with a ribbon.
- **Hanging biscuits:** stained-glass biscuits and thin spice biscuits, on a string, can be tied to the wrapping of another present.

The label

A pretty label is part of the gift and, more importantly, it protects the person who receives it. Always write:

- the name of the biscuits;

- the date they were made;
- "best before..." (see the table below);
- the allergens: **gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts** (almond, walnut, pine nut, hazelnut), depending on the recipe;
- how to store them: "in a sealed tin, in a cool place" or "keep in the fridge".

> **Tip:** if you are giving to someone with allergies, bake those biscuits first, with well-washed utensils, and pack them separately.

How long they keep

Biscuits	In a sealed tin	Frozen (without icing)
Olive oil biscuits, raivas, cantucci, speculoos, thin spice biscuits	4 weeks	3 months
Almond crescents, snowballs, cinnamon stars, honey broas, Lebkuchen, first gingerbread biscuits	3 weeks	3 months
Butter biscuits, piped shortbread, pinwheels, honey and orange biscuits, chocolate and pine nut sticks	2 weeks	3 months
Stars with royal icing, decorated gingerbread biscuits	2 weeks (once the icing has dried)	Do not freeze

Biscuits	In a sealed tin	Frozen (without icing)
Lemon slice-and-bake biscuits with icing	10 days	Freeze without icing
Cinnamon sugar, oat and cranberry, coconut rocks, spiced crackle biscuits, ginger chocolate, thumbprint, stained-glass, florentines, star trees	1 week	2 months (stained-glass and florentines: do not freeze)
Chocolate chunk biscuits	5 days	2 months
Sweet potato broas (*broas castelares*)	1 week, in a cool place	2 months
Filled Linzer biscuits	3 to 4 days (unfilled: 2 weeks)	Freeze only the unfilled biscuits
Chocolate sandwich biscuits with cream	5 days, in the fridge	Do not freeze

To defrost, leave the biscuits in the closed box at room temperature for 1 to 2 hours. If you want them crisper, put them in the oven at 160 °C (fan 140 °C, gas mark 3) for 3 minutes and leave to cool.

Jar mix for cocoa and white chocolate biscuits

1 jar of 1 litre, making about 20 biscuits · Preparing the jar: 15 min · Oven (for the recipient): 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4), 10–12 min · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

The dry ingredients in layers, inside a pretty jar, with the instructions on the label. The recipient only has to add butter and an egg to have freshly baked biscuits whenever they fancy.

INGREDIENTS (FOR THE JAR)

- 180 g plain flour
- 30 g unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- 100 g soft light brown sugar
- 80 g caster sugar
- 120 g white baking chocolate, chopped
- For the recipient: 125 g unsalted butter, melted and lukewarm, and 1 egg (medium)

METHOD

1. Wash and thoroughly dry a 1-litre glass jar with a lid.
2. In a bowl, mix the flour, cocoa, bicarbonate of soda and salt.

3. With the help of a paper funnel, put half of the flour mixture into the jar and press it down with the back of a spoon.
4. On top, make a layer of the brown sugar, pressing down well, and then one of the caster sugar.
5. Add the rest of the flour mixture and press down. Finish with the white chocolate, right up to the top. Seal well.
6. Write the label: "Tip the jar into a large bowl and mix. Add 125 g melted, lukewarm butter and 1 egg and stir until a dough forms. Chill in the fridge for 30 minutes. Shape into 30 g balls and place on a tray lined with baking parchment, 5 cm apart. Bake at 180 °C (fan 160 °C, gas mark 4) for 10 to 12 minutes, until the edges are firm. Leave on the tray for 10 minutes." Add the date and the allergens: gluten, egg and milk.

Storage: the sealed jar keeps for 1 month in a cool, dry place (check the dates on the chocolate and the flour). The baked biscuits keep for 5 days in a tin. Variation: swap the white chocolate for 80 g dark chocolate and 40 g dried cranberries. Common mistake: not pressing down the layers; they mix together and the jar will not hold everything.



Biscuits to give, in jars and little bags tied with ribbon

Photo: Lee Milo / Unsplash

Baking plan for December

The secret to arriving at Christmas with full tins and no stress is to begin with the biscuits that keep longest and leave the most delicate for last. Follow this plan to the letter or adapt it to your calendar.

When	What to do	Why
End of November	Check your equipment, buy fresh spices, jars, tins, ribbons and labels. Make a list of the people you will give to.	Avoids rushing and last-minute shopping

When	What to do	Why
1 to 7 December	Olive oil biscuits, raivas, cantucci, speculoos, thin spice biscuits	They keep for 4 weeks
8 to 12 December	Almond crescents, snowballs, cinnamon stars, honey broas, Lebkuchen	They keep for 3 weeks and improve over the days
13 to 15 December	First gingerbread biscuits, butter biscuits, pinwheels. Freeze logs of dough (lemon, pinwheels) for later.	They keep for 2 to 3 weeks; the logs are ready to slice
16 to 18 December	Stars with royal icing and decorated gingerbread biscuits. Bake the pieces for the gingerbread house.	The icing needs a night to dry
19 to 20 December	Assemble and decorate the gingerbread house. Piped shortbread, star trees, chocolate sticks. Prepare the jar mixes.	They will be ready to give in the last week
21 to 22 December	Cinnamon sugar, oat and cranberry, coconut rocks, thumbprint, stained-glass, florentines. Bake the Linzer biscuits (unfilled).	They keep for about 1 week: they stay fresh until the New Year
23 December	Sweet potato broas, chocolate chunk biscuits, lemon slice-and-bake biscuits (slice from the freezer). Fill the Linzer and chocolate sandwich biscuits.	The moistest and the filled ones, made as late as possible
24 December (Christmas Eve)	Put together the boxes for the Christmas Eve table and deliver the last presents.	A day to be with family, not at the oven

A well-organised baking afternoon

1. The day before, make two or three doughs and leave them in the fridge, well wrapped and with the name written on them.
2. On the day, start with the dough that bakes at the lowest oven temperature and work upwards gradually: an oven heats up faster than it cools down.
3. While one tray is baking, prepare the next on baking parchment on the worktop.
4. Cool each type of biscuit on a separate wire rack and store it as soon as it is cold, with a label.
5. Leave decorating for another day: with the biscuits already baked, decorating is far more relaxed.

> May this book give you many sweet afternoons and many boxes of biscuits to share. Merry Christmas!