

Common Cookie Queries—Creating Perfect Holiday Cookies

by baking and decorating guru Nancy Siler from Wilton Enterprises (NAPSA)—Few things put a family in the holiday spirit like rolling out the cookie dough and creating festive cookies. Here are a few helpful baking tips to help make every cookie recipe a mouth-watering treat.

First, make sure you have the right equipment. Take a look at your cookie sheet, if it's thin and worn or has dark, stained spots or burns—it may be time to invest in a new sheet. A warped sheet can ruin the best cookie recipe. Wilton recommends using an extra-thick aluminum sheet to ensure your cookies bake evenly and brown perfectly without burning.

It's important to place cookie dough on “cool” sheets only. If the cookie sheet is warm the cookies will spread faster, resulting in a thin, flat cookie. Place the cookie sheet on a rack in the center of the oven for best results.

Grab the mixer when you're beating butter, sugar, vanilla and eggs together. Flour and other dry ingredients such as baking powder and nuts should be stirred in to avoid overmixing the dough (which can result in dry cookies).

Cookie presses have never been easier, more comfortable and fun to use. Follow the manufacturer's recipes. Use real butter when baking cookies—no other product provides the flavor or texture of butter.

If your cookies stick to the bottom of the press or the shape doesn't come out crisp and nicely formed, the dough may be too soft. Add flour, a teaspoon at a time until dough reaches the proper consistency. It's also possible the dough is too warm. Try putting it in the refrigerator for a few minutes to bring it back to room temperature and its proper consistency. The dough also doesn't release well if it's too cold. Room temperature is best. When you're



ready to create cookies, place the press on the cookie sheet, gently pump or squeeze the handle, then lift the press off the sheet once enough dough has been released for a perfectly shaped cookie.

Cookie enthusiasts know the best cookie is straight from the oven. Knowing when a cookie is done can sometimes be tricky. For best results, follow the directions for baking times and preheat your oven to the temperature specified in the recipe. Wilton recommends checking cookies at the minimum bake time in the recipe. If you're going to look at them, do it through the window in the oven door instead of opening the door and losing heat.

Cool cookies completely before storing. Store crisp and soft cookies in separate containers.

For cookies that will be eaten in a day or two: store crisp cookies in a container with a loose-fitting cover; store soft cookies in a container with a tight-fitting cover. Separate very soft, fragile, frosted or decorated cookies with wax paper.

Freezing baked cookies is also a great way to preserve freshness. Baked cookies will keep in the freezer up to six months. Store them in an airtight container for optimal flavor retention.

For more baking tips and cookie recipes, visit www.wilton.com.