

Holiday Speculoos

Makes about 2 dozen cookies

Traditional speculoos are stamped with an image. While it's certainly worth the extra effort, I take the easy way out and simply cut out the cookies with regular cookie cutters. I give the cookies a little character by drizzling royal icing spiked with a bit of lemon juice over them.

1 stick unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ cup packed dark brown sugar
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon molasses
2 cups all purpose flour
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon sea salt
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
Pinch of ground red cayenne
For decorating: Royal icing (recipe follows), optional

Beat the butter, dark brown sugar, and sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer until light and fluffy. Add the molasses and beat just until combined.

In a large bowl, whisk together the remaining ingredients. Slowly add the dry ingredients to the butter and sugar mixture beating on medium speed until the dough forms a rough ball. Divide the dough in half and wrap each half in plastic wrap. Chill in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours and as long as overnight.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Working with one dough ball at a time, roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface to a ¼-inch thickness. I find that brushing the dough with flour using a pastry brush and rolling the dough out on parchment paper keeps the dough from sticking. Cut out the desired shapes using your favorite cookie cutters. Carefully transfer the cutout shapes to the parchment-lined baking sheet.

Bake for 8 to 10 minutes depending on how crispy you would like your cookies to be. Cool on the baking sheet for 5 minutes then transfer to a wire rack to finish cooling.

While the first batch is baking, roll out the second ball of dough and repeat the above steps. Scraps can be gathered together in a ball and rolled out again.

Cookies can be served plain or, if desired, can be drizzled with royal icing.

This recipe came from *Minced* at www.mincedblog.com.

Royal Icing

1 1/4 cups confectioners' sugar
2 1/2 teaspoons dried egg whites
1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 1/2 tablespoons warm water
Fresh lemon juice, to taste
Food coloring (optional)

In an electric mixer, beat the confectioners' sugar, dried egg whites, vanilla extract, and warm water on low speed until combined. Increase the speed of the mixer to medium and beat until the frosting is thick and has a glossy sheen, about 4 minutes. If the icing is too thick, add a little more warm water. If too thin, add some more confectioners' sugar. Add lemon juice to taste.

Color the icing with food coloring if desired. While icing can be drizzled over cookies using a spoon, I find that you have the most control if you pour the icing into small squeeze bottles. Squeeze bottles can be found at most restaurant supply stores and small bottles, perfect for decorating, can be purchased at Michael's and other craft stores.