

COOKIES
to die for!

COOKIES to die for!

BEV SHAFFER

Food Photography and Food Styling by
JOHN R. SHAFFER



PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY

GRETNA 2009

*To my mom, Olga, who taught me to love baking and to create with my hands
(“I just had to put apricot filling in the kiflis, Mom!”)*

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shaffer, Bev, 1951-
Cookies to die for! / Bev Shaffer ; food photography and food styling by John R.
Shaffer.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-58980-610-8 (hbk. : alk. paper) 1. Cookies. I. Title.

TX772.S49 2009

641.8'654—dc22

2008034679



Printed in China

Published by Pelican Publishing Company, Inc.
1000 Burmaster Street, Gretna, Louisiana 70053

Just when you think you have more time than necessary, life happens. That being said, I am grateful to a very large handful of people for their assistance with this labor of cookie love.

To my husband and dear friend, John, for his recipe testing, food styling, food photography, overall support, coordinating cookie testers, and making dinner. He's the kind of man to whom I can say, "You know, I really don't like that cookie photo at all," and he'll say, "Okay, we'll change it." (Now, he may go upstairs to his office and grumble, but I never know it!) I convinced him a few years ago to move from nature photography to food photography, and his food photos just keep getting mouthwateringly better. I guess I have to face it; he's just the perfect guy!

Special thanks to my friend, Vickie Getz, for unflinchingly reading and proofing the manuscript throughout the process. (Sorry we went down to the twelfth hour on this one, Vick!)

My cookie testers, oh, you sweet bakers. Special thanks to these ladies who each agreed to test a series of recipes on their own time, write baking notes, make comments, and gain a few pounds along with us. My sincere appreciation to: Julianna Baillis, Paula Horvath, Lisa Maglionico, Lisa Dellaflora, Tammy Bradfield, Barbara Cumming, Annette Felton, and Annette Sarich.

Fancifully decorating cookies is just not my thing, so special thanks also goes to Annette Felton for her crafting of the images of gingerbread cutouts, decorated cookies, and the flowerpot cookies.

Warm thanks to everyone at Pelican Publishing Company—from the warehouse staff to the office staff to the production and graphics department—for embracing this (and my other cookbooks) and then lavishing it with extraordinary attention. In particular, my appreciation goes to: Milburn and Nancy Calhoun, for their hospitality and support; Nina Kooij and the editorial staff; Kathleen Calhoun Nettleton and the promotion department; and Joseph Billingsley and the sales department.

Two manufacturers provided me with equipment I especially appreciated. I had fun using Chef's Choice PizzellePro Express Bake 835, which was perfectly sized for entertaining (and I am not easily entertained). It made three pizzelles every 45 to 60 seconds. My cookie sheets went through more uses than most of our cookie sheets go through in a lifetime. Anolon provided me with several of their cookie sheets (both nonstick and regular), and my favorites were the Anolon Commercial Bakeware, in particular the 14x16" size. These extremely sturdy sheets gave me even browning, resisted warping in the oven, and were easy to clean.

More than one of my testers told me they hadn't made cookies in awhile

and I had inspired them to bake again. My hope is a cookie or two will inspire *you* to take the time to know what goes into these simple, everyday pleasures. Handcraft several cookies over several weeks, only then can you choose whether to share them with friends and family . . . or horde them for yourself!

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*Just one bite of these Gingerbread Streusel Thins will confirm that you
can never be too thin—or have too much streusel!!*

COOKIE BITES

Growing up in a very ethnic family (Hungarian mother, Italian father) there was always something cooking and baking, and cookies are a big part of those memories.

I don't recall standing around the kitchen counter in my pinafore apron, taking my sweet old time decorating cute little cut-out cookies like so many of my Americanized friends did. We were into production, and when I think back, it was, of course, all done with a mixing bowl and a wooden spoon. No electric mixers, no food processors . . . the only thing that plugged in was the oven. It was all lovingly handmade.

So what were these cookie traditions? Kiflis, those gems of the Hungarian world that are made with a cream-cheese dough and are flaky and truly irresistible when warm . . . so irresistible you forget you're eating them until you notice the huge voids on the cooling racks where cookies used to be.

My mom was a true traditionalist when it came to baking those heritage recipes. She and her sisters grew up with fillings made of freshly ground poppy seeds, cooked in milk and butter, sweetened with sugar, and lightened by the flavor of lemon zest. No zester grater for these women; it was a box grater (I remember the handle was coming off the one in my childhood kitchen), and I don't remember the word "pith" ever being mentioned. These women just knew how to get the zest, and the zest only, off the lemon. There were fillings made of egg whites, whipped with a whisk to stiff peaks and folded into freshly ground walnuts (lots of them, pounds of them, not this 1 cup stuff we know today), with sugar and, once again, lemon zest to intensify the flavor. And, of course, there was the lekvar (prune butter) filling, which was the *only* filling my mom and aunts purchased. (Need I tell you it was imported from Hungary?)

But in our kitchen, there was NEVER apricot filling, so that delectable treat was satisfied, at holiday time only, when I visited a friend of German descent. Her mom made their version of kiflis with an apricot filling, and I tried, often times unsuccessfully, not to make a pig of myself.

We rolled, shaped, filled, and baked so many kiflis during Christmas and Easter that I often thought we were feeding all of New Jersey. But alas, soon they were gone until holiday time came around again.

During Christmas, we made Press Cookies. Huge batches of round, pressed cookies topped with glacé cherry halves. I would often eat the cherry half off *before* they went in the oven, but my help was too valuable, and I was never chased out of the kitchen for such behavior. (My Mom would just give me *the look* and I would stop.) We'd make green tree-shaped dough, press it out, and top it with colorful sprinkles. It was a sturdy cookie press with a comfortable handle and a barrel that held a substantial amount of dough. I still have that cookie press.

And that was it—no chocolate chip cookies, no oatmeal cookies when the holidays were not upon us. Since those formative years, I've been baking lots of cookies—rolled and sliced cookies, bar cookies, shaped and pressed cookies, cut-out cookies, and scooped and dropped cookies. Think of a combination of flavors and textures and I have—more than likely—taught it, demonstrated it, reworked it, gifted it, or made it and filed it away in my cookie collection memory bank. So, cookies to me, just as seasonal foods are touted today, bring anticipation of great flavors and wonderful memories in the kitchen.

This book invites you to start your own baking traditions at your home, although I highly recommend you bake cookies more than twice a year! There are some easy, flavorful recipes in this book you can put together in no time; some that are a little more complicated, and many that will become favorites—cookies you'll treat your friends, family, and yourself to again and again.

So, gather up that Organic Valley unsalted butter, that Bob's Red Mill unbleached white flour (my preferences, without apologies), the finest granulated cane sugar, chocolate and spices, and whatever else you need, and yes, pull out the stand mixer and plug it in. Heat the oven—I have my apron ready. Let's bake together and enjoy some great cookies my mom and aunts would be proud of!

COOKIES
to die for!



A basketful of sweet goodness . . . an assortment of cookies to die for!

COOKIE BASICS

From dough to decorations, baking to freezing, these sweet secrets will help ensure delicious cookie results. Now is the time to get out the mixing bowls, electric mixer, baking sheets, and wire cooling racks. Filling your cookie jar with crisp, chewy, or gooey goodies has never been easier.

My ingredients mostly include butter (I prefer unsalted and organic for that sweet, pure butter flavor), granulated pure cane sugar, large eggs (brown shell, organic), and unbleached, all-purpose flour (organic, but the most critical element is the unbleached). Use real butter, not margarine; margarine contains some water and will alter the texture of cookies and make for a less desirable flavor.

The recipes in this book call for various sugars: confectioners' sugar (always sift before use) dissolves easily, granulated sugar creates crunch and adds bulk, and brown sugar (light or dark, always firmly pack when measuring) contributes moisture to a cookie and a natural caramel flavor.

Measure precisely! Baking is a science and accuracy in measuring is important. When the recipe calls for softened (room temperature) butter, it should yield slightly to pressure yet not lose its shape when touched.

Don't overmix the dough once the dry ingredients are added; doing so often times results in one tough cookie (an admirable thing in a person, not a baked treat!) or a cookie that simply doesn't rise to the occasion. So, what's a baker to do? Mix just until the ingredients are combined, stopping to scrape the bowl often. I prefer a stand mixer for cookie dough; it allows me to easily combine ingredients and whip in air for a lighter texture.

When it comes to cookie sheets, I prefer heavy, shiny metal flat pans, with a lip on only one side. Cookies baked on nonstick sheets and dark cookie sheets have a tendency to brown too much on the bottom. Unless you're baking bar cookies, I prefer not to bake cookies on rimmed jellyroll pans, as they deflect heat and capture excess moisture, which makes for one soggy cookie! Parchment paper is still my preferred means of lining cookie sheets (even though I own silicone liners). Lining your sheets in this way, as opposed to greasing or spraying, keeps the sheets looking like new and prevents grease build up. I bake my bar cookies in shiny metal pans or good-quality ceramic pans, as opposed to glass. Glass conducts the heat differently,

and I have found inconsistent results. Your oven should be heated to the proper temperature before you begin baking. Invest in an oven thermometer for accuracy each and every time.

Wire cooling racks are a must, and I prefer the very large size with a grid pattern (so the delicate, small cookies don't fall through). These racks allow air to circulate under the cookies as they cool, keeping them from becoming soggy. For doughs that are chilled before baking, this helps solidify the fat and keeps the cookies from overspreading when they bake. Also, be sure to place your dough on cool baking sheets, as warm or hot pans will cause the cookies to spread or puff too much. You can quickly cool a baking sheet by placing it under cold running water; dry it thoroughly before arranging dough on the pan.

Always allow some room for spreading so cookies don't bake together into one huge amoeba (refer to fifth-grade science). I like to bake cookies in the middle of the oven or on the second rack from the bottom. If you bake two cookie sheets at once, which you almost always will do, rotate them halfway through the baking time. I rotate the pans top to bottom and front to back to ensure a more even bake. Allow your baked cookies to remain on the sheets for a few minutes before transferring them to wire cooling racks. If you try to remove them too soon, it usually results in broken cookies. (A fiendish trick if you want to try a not-so-perfect one in a hurry.)

SWEET SECRETS: INGREDIENTS

As I've mentioned, I naturally have ingredient preferences that I feel work best when creating and baking off recipes.

When it comes to flour, your best bet for general baking is an all-purpose flour, and an unbleached version (bleaching chemically whitens the flour) is my overall choice. To measure flour, spoon it into your measuring cup and use the flat side of a knife to level it.

When a recipe calls for eggs, always use large-size eggs unless otherwise specified. Crack the eggs into a small bowl before adding to the other ingredients; this way you can remove any stray pieces of shell that may have fallen into the bowl.

For superior flavor and texture you simply can't beat butter (well, you can beat it but only when it's softened). To soften butter, leave at room temperature for 30 minutes (cutting it into small pieces speeds up the process).

Baking soda and baking powder are not interchangeable. Baking soda works when mixed with an acidic ingredient such as buttermilk, sour cream,

or vinegar. On the other hand, baking powder works with a neutral liquid, such as water or milk, to cause rising.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention chocolate. Even for everyday baking, buy the best-quality chocolate (remember, your final product is only as good as the ingredients you've used). Most often, I use semisweet or unsweetened chocolate, or an unsweetened cocoa powder. If you prefer, as I often do, a bolder chocolate taste, choose bittersweet. Remember that bittersweet and semisweet are interchangeable, depending on what degree of sweetness you like your chocolate. Bittersweet contains less sugar than semisweet chocolate.

SWEET SECRETS: BAKING TIPS

From general hints to the top baking tips, this information will help you enjoy baking bliss.

Read through each recipe and assemble ingredients (chefs refer to this as *mise en place* or all things in their place). Prep ahead. Be sure you have the proper utensils and pan sizes needed as well.

Measure dry and liquid ingredients accurately to prevent your cookies and bars from becoming dry and crumbly or so soft that they spread out of shape during baking. Baking is a science, so measure up!

Heat your oven for 10 to 15 minutes before you begin baking. The oven and its gauge may not always agree, so use an oven thermometer. Keep in mind that the oven temperature drops 25 degrees every time the oven door is opened.

Lighten up a little. Don't overmix or beat the dough vigorously after adding the flour, or your baked goods may become tough.

For bar cookies, be sure to use the correct pan size. Center your baking pan or sheet in a preheated oven for optimum heat circulation.

Watch baking time carefully. If two sheets are in the oven at the same time, switch their positions midway through baking, helping to ensure more uniform results.

Cool cookies on wire cooling racks to ensure even air circulation. Hot cookie sheets need to cool, too; this helps prevent your cookies from spreading unnecessarily.

A few more things:

Use the freshest ingredients possible. The butter should be very fresh (considering that much of the flavor of a cookie is from the quality of this ingredient). Spices, nuts, and dried fruits should all be fresh, not old, shriveled, and flavorless.

The right touch (butter at the right consistency) is important to make sure that your cookies don't spread too much or not enough. Softened butter should give just slightly and leave an indentation when pressed down with a finger, while melted butter should be fluid and translucent. If you are in a hurry, cut the butter into tablespoon-sized pieces to speed softening; it will be soft enough to use in about 15 minutes.

Resist substituting with light or diet tub margarines or spreads as these contain not only less fat but more water and can cause a multitude of problems. The type of fat used in a recipe will affect results.

Remember that cookies will continue to bake on hot pans after they are removed from the oven. To avoid overbaking, remove the sheets from the oven a minute or two before cookies are completely done and browned to your liking. If you want an oatmeal cookie, for example, that's chewy in the middle, take them out of the oven before they look done. The cookies will set up as they cool.

SWEET SECRETS: COMMON COOKING MEASURES

These handy charts will help with the most common of questions, such as what exactly does a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of butter equal?

ABBREVIATIONS

STANDARD

tsp.	=	teaspoon
tbsp.	=	tablespoon
oz.	=	ounce
qt.	=	quart
lb.	=	pound

METRIC

ml.	=	milliliter
l.	=	liter
g.	=	gram
kg.	=	kilogram
mg.	=	milligram

MEASURE CONVERSION TABLE

1 teaspoon	=	$\frac{1}{3}$ tablespoon
3 teaspoons	=	1 tablespoon
2 tablespoons	=	$\frac{1}{8}$ cup
4 tablespoons	=	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup
8 tablespoons	=	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup
12 tablespoons	=	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup
14 tablespoons	=	$\frac{7}{8}$ cup
16 tablespoons	=	1 cup
1 pint	=	2 cups
1 quart	=	2 pints
1 liter	=	1.057 quarts
1 gram	=	0.35 ounces
1 ounce	=	28.35 grams
1 pound	=	16 ounces

STANDARD-METRIC APPROXIMATIONS

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon	=	.6 milliliter
$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon	=	1.2 milliliters
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon	=	2.5 milliliters
1 teaspoon	=	5 milliliters
1 tablespoon	=	15 milliliters
4 tablespoons	= $\frac{1}{4}$ cup	= 60 milliliters
8 tablespoons	= $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	= 118 milliliters
16 tablespoons	= 1 cup	= 236 milliliters
2 cups	=	473 milliliters
$2\frac{1}{2}$ cups	=	563 milliliters
4 cups	=	946 milliliters
1 quart	= 4 cups	= .94 liter

SOLID MEASUREMENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$ ounce	=	15 grams
1 ounce	=	25 grams
4 ounces	=	110 grams
16 ounces	= 1 pound	= 454 grams



Cookie baking “must haves” include a kitchen scale, zesters, sieves, oven thermometer, heavy cookie sheets, parchment paper, and several spatulas.

SWEET SECRETS: GET EQUIPPED

For batch after batch of delicious cookies, follow my basic cookie sheet secrets:

- * Use light-colored, heavy cookie sheets for best results. Dark sheets may cause cookies to overbrown. If you must use darker sheets, bake cookies for 1 to 2 minutes less. Do not use baking pans with high sides.
- * Use cookie sheets that are at least 2 inches narrower and shorter than the oven.
- * Always let cookie sheets cool before placing dough on them. Hot cookie sheets may cause cookies to spread and brown too much.

Having the right equipment is essential to great baking. Here’s what I love to have on hand.

A spring-handled cookie scoop, portion-control scoop, or disher are a baker’s best friend. They produce perfectly uniform, in size and shape, scoop and drop cookies. But what are those numbers engraved on the handles? Usually the number of the scoop indicates the number of level scoopfuls it takes to make 1 quart. The following gives an approximate measure for each scoop:



More baking necessities to make life easier: rolling pin, flour shaker, dough scraper, pastry brushes, measuring cups, measuring spoons, large cloth-covered board (for rolling dough)

Scoop Number 100	=	2 teaspoons
Scoop Number 70	=	2 ³ / ₄ teaspoons
Scoop Number 60	=	3 ¹ / ₄ teaspoons
Scoop Number 50	=	3 ³ / ₄ teaspoons
Scoop Number 40	=	1 ² / ₃ tablespoons
Scoop Number 30	=	2 tablespoons
Scoop Number 24	=	2 ³ / ₄ tablespoons
Scoop Number 20	=	3 ¹ / ₃ tablespoons
Scoop Number 16	=	¹ / ₄ cup
Scoop Number 12	=	¹ / ₃ cup

It's Just Grate: originally designed to function as a woodworking tool, a Microplane® grater-zester is a kitchen gadget tailor made for grating citrus zest. This tool makes it a breeze. I adore how its razor-sharp edges shave off the zest effortlessly. To use this tool, or a traditional lemon zester that pulls off the rind in thin strips, first wash and dry the fruit. Then, working over a piece of wax paper, rub the fruit over the grating holes with quick strokes. Don't apply too much pressure; the white pith is bitter. Strips from a traditional zester will need to be finely chopped before using.

Remember that not all measuring cups are created equal. Use flat-topped cups for dry ingredients, such as flour, and glass or plastic cups, with a spout for pouring and increments on the side, to measure liquids.

Parchment paper or silicone baking mats are perfect to line your baking sheets. There's no need for greasing your pans and cleanup will be a breeze.

Rolling dough for cut-out cookies is an easy task with my favorite piece of baking equipment, a round board (19") with rubber feet to prevent slipping. It has a removable cloth cover for washing. And I always use my tapered rolling pin, no ball bearings necessary.

As Mae West once said, "too much of a good thing is wonderful." Thus, I share here with you, just for the fun of it, my cookie-cutter collection, which is mostly metal. Note that not every cutter was used to test recipes in this book!

Bev's available cookie-cutter collection includes: house with chimney; various and assorted sizes of circles; various and assorted sizes of hearts; mini teddy bear; mini apples; various and assorted sizes of Christmas trees; mini holly; a very large State of Texas (is anything small about Texas?!); large maple leaf; plastic turtle; large white plastic numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 0; plastic camel; plastic teddy bear; plastic dove; plastic bunny; large reclining cat; dog bone; large heart with arrow; ice cream cone; library symbol (person and book); medium duck; pear; large, copper State of Ohio (unfortunately not as large as Texas!); large, copper pineapple; medium, copper whale; plastic acorn; elephant; biscuit cutter (round/reversible—plain and scalloped); duck; cat; bat; teapot; dinosaurs (assorted); toothbrush; pumpkin; musical note; anchor; donkey; star; man in the moon (crescent); lips, two sizes; umbrella; hand; running gingerbread man; crinkled star; medium heart with arrow; train engine car (or John thinks that this one is a running squirrel!); angel; Santa (assorted types); medium bell; medium piggy; turkey; mini bunny head; mini gingerbread girl; mini gingerbread boys (2); mini star; mini butterfly; mini bunny; mini reindeer; a set of graduated-size crinkle oval cutters; a set of graduated-size crinkled rounds; a set of graduated-size plain

rounds; diamond; bunny; very large turkey; brontosaurus; crinkle fan; g-man; cardinal; 6½-inch queen; foot; shamrock; tooth; leaf; turtle; teddy bear; apple; medium State of Ohio; pineapple; airplane; papa bear; elephant; medium bunny; cowboy boot; g-man (with handle); g-man (large); baby buggy; mini pumpkin; mini baby chick; arrow; umbrella; rolling pin; egg; angel; daisy; fireplug; shooting star; large cowboy hat; cactus; palm tree; small gingerbread boy; jalapeño pepper; mini cactus; mini star; mini airplane; mini cross; mini birdhouse; mini carrot; mini leaf; mini egg; witch hat; large bat; ghost; reindeer; scaredy cat; 4½" copper g-man; large star; tiered (wedding) cake; high-heel shoe; gingerbread house; large butterfly; large palm tree; snowflake set (3 shapes). Whew!

SWEET SECRETS: ARE YOU MY TYPE?

The following are some special helps for specific cookie types, with more information appearing in each recipe's instructions.



You found your way up there, now find your way down!

Bars: For best appearance, cool in pan completely before cutting into pieces unless otherwise stated in recipe. Some do and some don't like to use the "foil release" method for bar cookies. If you do, line the pan completely with foil (being sure the foil doesn't tear and does overhang at least 1" above the pan's edges). Gently grease the foil (if called for in the recipe). When the bars are completely cooled, this method enables you to carefully lift the entire "bar" out of the pan, fold down the foil, then cut without pan interference.

Drop: For uniform-sized cookies, use the same amount of dough for each cookie and mound each slightly. For ease in achieving this, a scale, 2 regular teaspoons, or a commercially made cookie-dough disher, dropper, or scoop work well.

Shaped: It is often times beneficial to chill dough for easier handling, dusting hands lightly with flour to help prevent sticking when rolling each cookie smoothly between palms of hands. For "flattened" cookies, press each scoop of dough with a fork, bottom of a glass dipped in sugar or flour, or a thumb. To maximize flavor and appearance, cookies to be rolled in confectioners' sugar or cocoa powder should be coated once while still warm and then again after cooling.

Pressed: For tender cookies, use room temperature butter, creaming with other ingredients just until light and fluffy. Test consistency by pushing a small amount of dough through the press. Dough that is too soft may benefit from a brief period of refrigeration or the addition of 1 to 2 tablespoons of flour. Dough that is too stiff may be remedied with the addition of a tablespoon of milk or 1 egg yolk. Beginning with a cool baking sheet, hold press so it rests on sheet and force dough onto sheet, raising press only when correct form is achieved.

Refrigerator: For firm, smoothly shaped rolls, wrap rolls of dough securely in plastic wrap or waxed paper and chill for 30 minutes. Remove and roll back and forth on counter until a cylindrical shape is reached. Refrigerate, tightly wrapped, for at least 2 hours up to overnight to allow roll to firm up completely. Unwrap and slice evenly with a thin, sharp knife for baking.

Rolled: For tender cookies, roll out small amounts of dough from center to edges with light, even strokes. A floured pastry cloth and lightly floured rolling pin are helpful to roll out dough with a minimum of flour on the rolling surface. I always use a rolling-the-dough flour mixture of $\frac{2}{3}$ -part flour and $\frac{1}{3}$ -part confectioners' sugar, sifted, for a light, flavorful cookie. For a crisper cookie, roll thinly; for a softer cookie, roll thicker. Cut cookies as closely together as possible using cutters dipped in flour. To prevent breaking, move cookies to and from baking sheets with a wide spatula or pancake turner.

SWEET SECRETS: ANY WAY YOU SPREAD 'EM

Icing, frosting, or glaze, no matter what you call 'em, these pleasurable toppings might very well be the icing on your next cookie!

Royal Icing

This icing hardens as it dries and is ideal for piping decorations on cooled cookies.

1¹/₄ cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
1 tbsp. meringue powder
2 tbsp. warm water
1/4 tsp. cream of tartar

Combine the confectioners' sugar, meringue powder, warm water, and cream of tartar in a large mixing bowl. Beat at low speed with an electric mixer until moistened. Increase the speed to medium. Beat until stiff and glossy (2 to 4 minutes). Add an additional tbsp. of hot water if too stiff.

Cover bowl with a damp towel until ready to use or cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 day. To restore texture, allow icing to reach room temperature, then rebeat. Makes about ³/₄ cup.

Best Buttercream Frosting

This is a creamy butter frosting, a perfect base for a variety of flavored frostings as well.

3/4 cup unsalted butter, softened
6 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
1/8 tsp. salt
1/3 cup heavy (whipping) cream
1 tsp. vanilla
2 tbsp. light corn syrup

Place butter in a large mixer bowl. Beat at medium speed with an electric mixer, scraping bowl occasionally, until creamy (about 2 minutes).

Gradually add confectioners' sugar and salt, alternately with heavy cream and vanilla, scraping bowl often, until well blended. Beat in corn syrup until well mixed. Makes about 3 cups.

BEV'S BITES

Two to three cups of frosting is enough to decorate at least 2 to 3 dozen cookies.

Best Buttercream Variations

Variety is the frosting of life!

Lemon/Orange Frosting: Stir in 1 tbsp. of freshly grated and finely chopped lemon or orange zest.

Creamy Coconut Frosting: Stir in 1½ tsp. of coconut extract.

Chocolate Frosting: Add 1 or 2 oz. of unsweetened chocolate, melted and cooled; an additional tbsp. or two of sifted confectioners' sugar may be necessary to reach the desired spreading consistency.

Creamy Butter Frosting

This creamy frosting is great for decorating. Tint with food coloring if desired.

4 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
½ cup unsalted butter, softened
2 tbsp. vanilla
3 to 4 tbsp. milk, whole or 2 percent

Combine the confectioners' sugar, butter, and vanilla in a small mixer bowl. Beat at low speed with an electric mixer, gradually adding milk and scraping the bowl often, until you have reached the desired spreading consistency.

Decorate cooled cookies or bars. Cover; store refrigerated. Makes 2¼ cups.

Confectioners' Sugar Glaze

This glaze hardens on standing and gives cookies the perfect glazed surface for decorating. Tint with food coloring if desired.

2½ cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
2 tbsp. water
1 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
1 tbsp. light corn syrup
½ tsp. vanilla or almond extract, if desired

Combine the confectioners' sugar, water, butter, corn syrup, and vanilla in a small mixer bowl. Beat at medium speed with an electric mixer until smooth, adding additional water if necessary to achieve desired spreading consistency.

Glaze cookies. Let stand until hardened (6 hours or overnight). Makes 1 cup.

SWEET SECRETS: STORAGE STRATEGIES

In General:

Store baked cookies only after they're completely cooled. Condensation makes them soggy if stored while they're still warm. Cooled cookies are best stored in an airtight container if the cookies are crisp, in a loosely covered container if the cookies are soft. Cookie jar storage is for short-term keeping only.

Store Me or Freeze Me:

Store crisp and softer cookies separately. Softer cookies will leach moisture (oh my!) that will cause crisp cookies to go limp. If crisp cookies do soften, you can re crisp them by baking at 300 degrees for 5 minutes, then cooling completely on a wire rack. To soften up stale cookies, add a piece of apple to the container, discarding it after 1 day.

Bar cookies may be stored, tightly covered, in the baking pan. For food safety, some frostings, fillings, or other ingredients may require refrigerator storage. I don't recommend freezing unbaked bar cookies. If you can live without the pan for awhile, you can freeze cooled bars right in the baking pan, with plastic wrap pressed directly on the surface; cover the whole pan tightly with foil.

Frosted or filled thumbprint cookies should be stored in a single layer in a tightly covered container. If space is limited, allow frosting or filling to become firm before storing, then layer cookies between waxed paper to protect appearance.

Most cookie doughs can be refrigerated for up to 2 days (tightly wrapped in plastic wrap and foil or stored in an airtight container to prevent the dough from drying out or picking up odors from other foods) or frozen for up to 3 months in an airtight container or freezer bag. (Dough will need to be thawed in the refrigerator about 8 hours before using). If the dough is frozen in cookie "portions," there's no need to thaw the frozen dough, just bake an additional 1 or 2 minutes.

Rolled and cut-out cookies (unbaked and decorated or simply cut out and left plain until later) should be stored between layers of waxed paper in the freezer for up to 3 months.

Slice and bake cookies are a breeze to freeze. Freeze the dough logs, and then slice just before baking. If the dough logs are too firm, thaw just slightly at room temperature for 10 to 15 minutes. Logs freeze well for up to 3 months.

Except for meringues, scooped and dropped cookies can be frozen in dough balls in a single layer on a baking sheet, then transferred to a heavy-duty Ziploc plastic storage bag and stored in the freezer for up to 3 months. Before final shaping, thaw slightly at room temperature for 10 to 15 minutes.

At holiday time, you may wind up with lots of baked cookies. Here's an overview of the best way to freeze them (but I can't guarantee that a certain someone won't raid your freezer and eat them all!):

- * Remember to separate the cookies by type (crispy or chewy).
- * Cookies and bars are easier to stack and freeze without the frosting or glaze. You can always plan to add the frosting or glaze to thawed cookies and bars.
- * Store cookies in freezer containers, between layers of wax paper.
- * Seal containers tightly, label, and date.
- * Thaw cookies in the original containers at room temperature so that condensation forms on the wrapping, not on the cookies! Or, for crisp cookies, unwrap them and place in a single layer on a plate for about 15 minutes. This will prevent them from becoming soggy.

SWEET SECRETS: THAT SHOULDN'T BE THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES

Below are some possible problems, potential causes, and suggested fixes—sweet secrets indeed!

Cookie Problem: Spreading/Flat

Potential Causes and Suggested Fixes:

Dough was placed on hot/warm cookie sheets. Let cookie sheets cool between uses.

Low oven temperature. Use an oven thermometer to check actual temperature and adjust accordingly. Be sure to preheat the oven 10 to 15 minutes before baking. A good habit is to turn the oven on as the first step of the recipe.

Greased cookie sheet. Only grease or line cookie sheet if recipe directs.

Old Fashioned/Rolled Oats absorb water slower than Quick Oats. Refrigerate cookie dough 20 minutes, or until firm. Cookies will take slightly longer to bake completely.

Warm kitchen causes dough to become very soft. Refrigerate cookie dough 20 minutes, or until firm. Cookies will take slightly longer to bake completely.

Cookie Problem: Doughy

Potential Causes and Suggested Fixes:

Cookies are underbaked. Do not use cookie sheets that have sides that prevent hot air from circulating around the cookies.

Insulated cookie sheets don't get as hot as a regular cookie sheet. Bake cookies longer than the suggested time range since most recipes are not developed for insulated cookie sheet use.

Cookies are not uniform in size, which means they don't bake evenly. Use 2 teaspoons, a measuring tablespoon, a commercial cookie disher, or scoop to portion out cookie dough and ensure that all are a similar size.

Cookie Problem: Soggy/Crumbly

Potential Causes and Suggested Fixes:

Cookies cooled on sheet too long. Follow cooling directions in recipe. If no directions are given, immediately remove cookies from sheet and place on a wire rack in a single layer to cool completely.

Cookies placed in storage container while still warm. Cool cookies completely on a wire rack before putting in a storage container.

Cookie Problem: Dry/Hard as rocks

Potential Causes and Suggested Fixes:

Using shortening in a recipe that calls for butter. When using shortening in a recipe that calls for butter, it is necessary to add some additional water or milk. Add 1 tablespoon for each $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shortening. Example: for 1 cup shortening, add 2 tablespoons water.

Overmixed dough. Don't vigorously mix the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients. Overmixing is easy to do with electric mixers.

Overmeasuring dry ingredients. Spoon dry ingredients into measuring cups; don't scoop.

Cookie Problem: Difficult to remove from sheet

Potential Causes and Suggested Fixes:

Often lower fat cookies will stick to the sheet. Line cookie sheet with parchment paper, silicone liner, or spray cookie sheet with nonstick vegetable oil cooking spray.

Cookies cooled on sheet too long. Follow cooling directions in recipe. If no directions are given, immediately remove cookies from sheet and place on a wire rack in a single layer to cool completely. Return sheet of cookies to hot oven for 1 minute, then loosen cookies and remove to wire rack to cool.

Cookie Problem: Dark/Burned

Potential Causes and Suggested Fixes:

You're not paying attention. Set timer.

Using a dark-colored cookie sheet. Use a light-colored cookie sheet, which doesn't get as hot as a dark-colored sheet because it absorbs less heat. This helps prevent cookies from overbrowning.

Oven rack too low. Place rack in the center of the oven.

Oven temperature too high. Use an oven thermometer to check the actual oven temperature and adjust accordingly.

Cookies placed close to the edge of the sheet will bake faster than cookies in the center. Avoid jamming as many cookies as possible onto a sheet. Instead, place cookies about 2 inches apart and avoid putting them close to the edge.

Cookie sheet is too big for the oven, preventing hot air from circulating around the sheet. Use a cookie sheet that is at least 2 inches smaller than the oven so that the warm air will circulate evenly around the sheet.

SWEET SECRETS: SHARING

Sharing your cookies with a roomful of friends is one of life's sweet joys. The cookie exchange is ever popular, with the tradition of having guests bring a batch (or more) of one kind (or more) of cookie to an exchange party, where they can swap and take home an assortment, has spread to every corner of the country.

The perfect opportunity to spend a relaxing afternoon with friends and return home with a variety of cookies you didn't have to bake yourself is a wonderful idea. Never hosted a cookie exchange? The following are some tips for hosting a perfectly sweet party of your own:

- * Invite no more than twelve people. Ask each guest to bake and bring three or four dozen cookies of one kind (or more for the ambitious).
- * Remember that the cookies are the guests of honor and should be featured prominently. A cookie exchange is the perfect time to pull out your favorite decorative plates, tiered cake stands, doilies, vintage tablecloths, or anything to make the cookies even more inviting.
- * At the party, guests will package and take home a selection of every type of cookie except their own—just be sure that everyone knows the limit so that all of the attendees end up with approximately the same number of cookies.
- * Holiday cookies are always a crowd pleaser, but there's nothing wrong with having your guests bring a childhood favorite cookie. Have a "favorite cookie" contest, giving everyone a chance to vote, and awarding a copy of this book, *COOKIES to Die For!*, as the prize.
- * Don't forget to provide light appetizers and refreshing drinks, and some tins or boxes and waxed paper for everyone to pack up their favorites at the end.

SWEET SECRETS: COOKIES GO BYE-BYE

Packing Tips for Shipping Cookies:

The best cookies for mailing are soft, moist, and sturdy, such as oatmeal cookies or some bar cookies.

Avoid mailing cookies that are thin, fragile, frosted, or have pointed edges that may break off. (Instead, eat them immediately!)

Remember to keep soft and crisp cookies separate.

To pack the cookies, select a sturdy box and line it with waxed paper or

plastic wrap, then cushion the bottom with crumpled newspaper. Pack the cookies in one of two ways:

* *This Way*—Pack the cookies in tins or coffee cans, separating layers with waxed paper. Heavy cookies should be in the bottom layers. Then place the tins in the lined box, surrounding sides and top with more crumpled newspaper before sealing.

* *That Way*—If containers are not used, wrap cookies in pairs (back to back), or wrap bar cookies individually with plastic wrap or foil. Pack them in a lined box so they don't shift around. Top with another layer of crumpled newspaper before sealing.