

Spicy Gingerbread Cookies (for eating or decorating)

Mark Suggs

1 cup unsalted butter
1 cup dark-brown sugar, packed
2 large eggs
1 cup unsulfured molasses
6 cups sifted all-purpose unbleached flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
4 teaspoons ground ginger
4 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1-1/2 teaspoons ground cloves
1/2 teaspoon finely ground black pepper
1-1/2 teaspoons salt
Sprinkles, various candies for decoration
Royal Icing for decoration (recipe below)
String or thin ribbon (if using as ornaments)

In a large bowl, beat together butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs and molasses. In another bowl, sift together flour, baking soda, baking powder, spices and salt. Stir flour mixture into butter mixture. Divide dough in half and wrap each half in plastic wrap. If desired, chill for about 1 hour. Preheat oven to 350 F. Roll dough 1/8 inch thick on generously floured counter top or cutting board. Cut into shapes with cookie cutters. Transfer shapes to lightly greased cookie sheets. Bake for 8-10 minutes or until crisp but not dark. Cooking time will depend on actual thickness of cookie. Allow to cool on the cookie sheet for 1 minute, then remove to wire racks to cool completely. If desired, decorate with Royal Icing and decorating candies. You can use the royal icing as 'glue' to keep the candy in place.

Note: If you are going to use the cookies for decorations, make a hole for the cord or hook by poking the cookies with a toothpick or skewer as soon as they come out of the oven. This can also be done prior to baking.

Royal Icing

1 pound powdered sugar
5 tablespoons meringue powder
2 tablespoons water
food coloring

Combine powdered sugar and meringue powder in a mixing bowl and beat on low speed. Add water drop by drop. The amount depends on the temperature and humidity in your kitchen. Add the water slowly and do not let the mixture get runny - you will probably not use all of it. If you mix it too thin, just add more powdered sugar. Beat until the mixture holds a trail on the surface for five seconds when you raise the mixer from the bowl. If you like, you can tint the icing with a few drops of food coloring. (Yield about 3 cups)