

Cut-out Cookie Basics

Objective: Children will prepare and bake cut-out cookies using a scratch recipe.

Recommended Ages: 9 years old and up

Time required for project: 1- 1 ½ hours

Overview

This project is designed to introduce children to baking cut-out cookies using a scratch recipe. They will learn about properly measuring and mixing the ingredients, try two different methods for rolling out the dough, as well as how to bake and properly store and freeze cookies. Leaders should determine ahead of time how many adult helpers are needed. Depending on the age of the group, 1 adult for every 8 - 10 children should be enough.

Supplies

Wilton Items needed (to be shared by group):

- ✓ 3-4 Cookie Sheets
- ✓ At least 2 - 20 in. Fondant Rollers or French Rolling Pins (optional)
- ✓ Cookie Cutters
- ✓ 2 Cookie Spatulas
- ✓ 2 Cooling Grids
- ✓ Rainbow Jimmies and Sparkling Sugar Sprinkles
- ✓ 2 Cookie Icing Pouches, color of choice (optional)
- ✓ Gel Icing Color (optional)
- ✓ 2 Decorator Brushes (optional)
- ✓ Parchment Paper (optional)

Additional Kitchen Supplies to be shared (either leader can provide, or children can bring their own):

- ✓ Ingredients for recipe on pg. 8
- ✓ Electric mixer
- ✓ Food scale (optional)
- ✓ Measuring cups and spoons
- ✓ Large rubber spatulas
- ✓ 2 Rolling pins (if not using 20 in. Fondant Roller or French Rolling Pin)
- ✓ Wax paper (only if not using Parchment Paper)
- ✓ 2 Pastry brushes (if not using Decorator Brushes)
- ✓ Paper towels
- ✓ Small bowl of water (to adhere sprinkles)
- ✓ Confectioners' sugar
- ✓ Toothpicks (if using Icing Colors to tint dough)
- ✓ 1 one-gallon plastic storage bag to transport dirty tools home
- ✓ Container to transport decorated cookies home, 1 per child

Project Outline

1. Introduction
2. Preparing the Cookie Dough Recipe

3. Rolling out the Dough
4. Cutting the Dough
5. Baking
6. Icing the Cookies (optional)
7. Storing the Cookies
8. Clean-up/Wrap-up

INTRODUCTION - Provide quick overview of project

PREPARING THE COOKIE DOUGH RECIPE

Review with children and assist with preparing recipe.

Ingredients

- Use the best cookie ingredients possible. Choose butter over margarine, pure vanilla extract over imitation, and for other cookie recipes that call for it, buy quality chocolate or cocoa powder.
- Check the expiration date on your baking powder to make sure it is not stale. It begins to lose its potency after about six months and should be replaced if it is any older than that.
- Unless the recipe states otherwise, bring your butter, eggs, and any other chilled ingredients to room temperature before mixing. This will help the dough come together faster and create a more uniform texture. Butter that is room temperature is actually cool to the touch, not warm. When you press it with your finger, it should make a slight indent.



- Conversely, butter that is too warm could cause ultra-flat cookies. A good rule of thumb is to remove the butter from the refrigerator about one hour before you need it.
- For best results, weigh your flour with a food scale to ensure the proper amount. One cup of flour weighs about 130 grams. If you do use a measuring cup, don't scoop the flour out of the bag with the cup because that packs in excess flour. Instead, spoon the flour into the measuring cup, then level it off. Too much flour can make the cookies dry, too little can cause excess spreading.
- Do not forget to scrape the bottom of the bowl, as dry ingredients can sometimes get trapped.
- Do not overmix the ingredients. It can cause the dough to harden, making the cookies tough, and whipping too much air into the dough can also cause your cookies to collapse when they bake.

Dough Add-ins - Explain these easy options for adding color to the dough, which are great time-saving alternatives to using icing to decorate the cookies. Consider dividing the dough into thirds, having group #1 mix sprinkles into their dough, group #2 tint their dough using Icing Color, and group #3 add Sparkling Sugars to the tops of the cut-out dough shapes before baking. Have each group share the results of their add-in.

- Sprinkles

- Add sprinkles to the dough after all other ingredients have been mixed in. Jimmies work best when mixing the sprinkles into the dough because they tend to be softer than most other types of sprinkles.
- After placing cut shapes of dough on the cookie sheet, brush the tops of the cut-out dough shapes with a little water using a damp Decorator Brush before adding sprinkles. The water will help the sprinkles adhere to the cookies while not changing the finished appearance of the cookie after baking. Stress the importance of using a brush that is designated for food crafting only. Jimmies and Sparkling Sugars work best for topping unbaked cookies.



- Tinting the dough

Color can be added to dough using one of the following after all the ingredients have been mixed in:

- Liquid food coloring found in the baking aisle at the grocery store can be used but has limitations:
 - Color options are usually limited to just 4 base colors, limiting the color combinations you can create.
 - Because food coloring is liquid, it can affect the consistency of the dough, especially when you need to add a lot to create an intense color.
- Gel Icing Colors
 - Because Icing Colors are a gel form and the colors are concentrated, they will not change the consistency of the dough.
 - Available in 25 colors.
 - To use:
 - Dip a toothpick into the Icing Color jar, then swirl it in the dough.
 - Mix the dough only until color is blended evenly into it. **HINT:** For added interest, create a marbled effect by only partially mixing in the color.

- If a more intense color is desired, use a fresh toothpick each time you add more color to avoid contaminating the gel remaining in the jar.

ROLLING OUT THE DOUGH – Consider setting up two rolling stations, one using a floured surface and the other using the non-flour parchment paper method. Have children try both stations and discuss which method they preferred and why.

- Floured vs. non-floured surface

- **Floured Surface:** Use as little flour on the surface and on the rolling pin as possible. Too much flour will toughen the dough and affect the texture of the finished cookies.

TIP: Consider dusting the surface with confectioners' sugar instead of flour because confectioners' sugar won't toughen the dough like flour can.

- **Non-floured surface:** For easier clean-up and to prevent the dough from sticking to your work surface or the rolling pin, roll the dough between sheets of parchment paper or wax paper.

TIP: Do not remove the bottom piece of parchment paper from the rolled-out dough. Instead, slide the paper with the dough right onto a cookie sheet and proceed with cutting out the shapes. This will eliminate the need to transfer the cut-out dough, so the shapes won't get distorted.



- Most cut-out cookie recipes require the dough to be chilled before rolling it out. Not only will this help the cut-out dough shapes retain their shape while baking, but the dough is less likely to stick to the surface when using the floured surface method.
NOTE: The recipe provided on pg. 8 can be used immediately after the ingredients are mixed; it does not need to be chilled prior to rolling out.
- Be sure to roll the dough to the thickness that the recipe calls for. Rolling the dough too thin will result in burnt cookies while rolling it too thick will require longer baking time.
- When rolling the dough, use short, light-pressure sweeps, beginning in the center of the dough. This will help achieve an even thickness and prevent the dough from being overworked. Excessive kneading and rolling will cause the dough to get tougher, resulting in harder cookies.
- Avoid letting the rolling pin run off the edges of the dough because that will cause the edges to get too thin.

CUTTING THE DOUGH – Review with children and assist with cutting

- Dip cookie cutters in flour between almost every cut. This will not only prevent the dough from sticking to your cutter, but the flour on the edges of the cookie will help seal it, which will help your cookies keep their shape in the oven.

- Lay a cookie cutter on the dough and press firmly, straight down and lift straight up, without twisting and sliding the cutter.
- When cutting out a batch of shapes from the rolled-out dough be sure to position the cutter as close as possible to the dough edge to minimize scraps and the need to re-roll the dough multiple times.
- Once the shapes are cut, peel away the dough scraps. You'll be less likely to distort the shapes if the extra dough is out of the way before attempting to lift the cut-outs. Use a cookie spatula to transfer the cut-outs onto a cookie sheet.

BAKING – Review with children and assist with baking

- Make sure your oven is fully preheated before baking. If you put the cookies in too soon, they will take longer to bake and that gives the butter more time to melt and spread out, resulting in a flat, distorted shape.
- Use an oven thermometer to ensure proper calibration. Just because you set the oven to the temperature that the recipe calls for, that doesn't mean that's the temperature your oven preheated to. Just having your temperature off by 25°F is enough to ruin a batch of cookies by over-browning, excessive spreading, under-baking in the center, or uneven baking.
- Generally, when using a convection oven, the temperature should be reduced by 25°F because the heat in a convection oven is being blown by fans, distributing the heat evenly all around the food. The heat source in a conventional oven, on the other hand, is stationary and rises up from the bottom.
- Dark colored pans absorb more heat than light ones, causing your cookies to overbake. If that's the only type of pan you have, try reducing the oven temperature by 25°F. Using an air-insulated design will prevent the bottoms of your cookies from burning.
- While most cut-out cookie recipes call for ungreased cookie sheets, some cookie recipes do require a greased pan. Greasing the pan can cause excessive spreading during baking and leads to flatter cookies. Lining the pan with parchment paper or a silicone mat will not only prevent the cookies from sticking and spreading but it will also make cleaning up your pan much easier.
- Most varieties of cookie dough will spread at least a little while they are baking so it's important to give them enough space to expand, without moving into their neighbor's space. Spacing the dough about 1 in. apart is usually good for cut-out cookies. Drop cookies usually require further spacing, approximately 2 in. apart, unless the recipe tells you otherwise.
- Never place raw cookie dough onto a hot cookie sheet. If you are using the same cookie sheet for several batches, allow the pan to cool back down to room temperature between uses. To speed up the cooling process, place the hot pan on a cooling rack. This will allow air to circulate completely around the pan, helping it to cool off more quickly.
- If using a conventional oven, since the heat rises from the bottom, it's best to bake just one batch at a time and use only the middle rack. This will allow for the most even heat circulation. If you absolutely have to double up, be sure rotate the pans halfway through the

baking time, from the top to bottom rack AND turn the cookie sheet around as well to try to maintain even baking.

- As tempting as it is, do not open the oven door repeatedly. Every time you open the door, the heat escapes, causing the oven temperature to drop. Instead, make it a habit to turn on the oven light and peek through the oven window to check on the progress.
- Always, always set the timer, even if you think you won't need it. For your first run of the batch, check the cookies after the minimum suggested baking time, then adjust the time accordingly for the next batch. If the timer says the cookies aren't done but your nose and eyes tell you otherwise, go with your gut instinct. Generally, cut-out cookies are done when the edges start to get golden brown. Crispy cookies are done if the centers look "set", they are firm to the touch and golden brown around the edges. Soft, moist cookies are done when you can press them lightly with your finger and there's no imprint. The top centers can look slightly under-baked, too, if you prefer a softer cookie.
- Cookies will continue to cook on the pan after they are removed from the oven, which can lead to over browning on the bottoms. This can also cause the cookies to get a bit soggy because the steam isn't able to escape on the bottom.
- Unless your recipe tells you otherwise, let the cookies sit on the pan for about 2-3 minutes, then use a spatula to transfer them to a cooling rack. Be careful not to remove them from the pan too soon because they are more susceptible to breaking if you attempt to remove them immediately after taking them out of the oven. **HINT:** A cooling rack with a grid-like design prevents even your smallest cookies from slipping through the cracks.
- If you lose track of time, leave the cookies on the pan too long and the cookies end up sticking, return them to the oven for about 1 minute, then immediately remove them with a spatula.



ICING THE COOKIES (optional) – If time permits, use Cookie Icing Pouches to drizzle icing onto cooled cookies.

STORING COOKIES – While children sample their cookies, explain the proper way to store the leftovers, as well as the options for freezing cookies and dough.

At Room Temperature

- Store in an airtight container or resealable bag for up to 2 weeks. Some recipes start to lose their softness after about 5 days but are still fine to eat.

In the Freezer

- Place baked, un-iced cookies in an airtight container or resealable bag between pieces of parchment paper or wax paper.
- When stored properly, un-iced cookies can be frozen for 4-6 months.
- Don't place cookies near strong smelling foods in your freezer because the cookies can absorb odors from those other foods and alter how the cookies will taste.

- Unbaked dough can also be frozen by shaping the dough into a disk, wrap it in plastic wrap, then place it in a resealable bag and freeze for up to 3 months. Dough can also be cut into the shapes and placed between parchment paper before freezing. By adding a few minutes to the bake time, the cookies can go straight from the freezer into the oven, eliminating the wait time for thawing.



CLEAN-UP AND WRAP-UP

INSPIRATION



ROLL-OUT COOKIE DOUGH
(Make about 3 dozen cookies)

Ingredients

3 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
1 cup granulated sugar
1 egg
2 teaspoons Vanilla Extract
½ teaspoon Almond Extract

Directions

Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a large bowl, cream the butter and sugar with an electric mixer until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs and extracts.

Mix together flour, baking powder and salt in medium bowl. Add flour mixture to butter mixture, 1 cup at a time, mixing after each addition. Do not chill dough. Divide dough into 2 balls.

On a floured surface, roll each ball into a circle, approximately 12 in. diameter x 1/8 in. thick. Using cookie cutters dipped in flour, cut out shapes. Place on ungreased baking sheet.

Bake cookies 8-11 minutes or until lightly browned. Move cookies to a cooling rack to cool completely.

Yield: 3 dozen 3-in. cookies

Note: The use of 2 extracts in this recipe really enhances the flavor. To customize your cookies, substitute your favorite flavor for the almond and vanilla extract. Almond, lemon, and peppermint are particular favorites for cookies. Adding grated lemon or lime zest also adds rich citrus flavor.