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books

SLICE & BAKE COOKIES

FAST RECIPES FROM YOUR REFRIGERATOR OR FREEZER

Elinor Klivans *Photographs by Yunhee Kim*



CHRONICLE BOOKS

SAN FRANCISCO

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INGREDIENTS, EQUIPMENT & TECHNIQUES

If there is one thing that all of these cookies have in common, it's that the ingredients and equipment are simple. You probably already have the majority of the ingredients in your pantry, and if you have several baking sheets and a saucepan, your equipment needs are mostly taken care of.

COOKIE INGREDIENTS

Good-quality ingredients are essential for making good cookies. Here are my preferences.

Butter, Oil, Cream Cheese & Sour Cream

Unsalted butter is used in all of the recipes requiring butter. I store it in my freezer to keep it fresh. Using unsalted butter allows you to control the exact amount of salt in the recipe. When using oil, I prefer corn or canola oil because they are low in saturated fat (the bad fat) and high in monounsaturated fat (the good fat). Both are tasteless and will not affect the flavor of cookies. Always smell oil before using it to make sure it's fresh and doesn't have a rancid or "off" odor. Use full-fat cream cheese and sour cream. Low-fat versions can affect the cookie dough and the baked cookies, and not in a good way.

Chocolate

Choose a good-quality chocolate that tastes good. The ingredients in white chocolate should include cocoa butter, and those in dark chocolate should include chocolate liquor or chocolate. Strange as it may seem, there are products made with artificial ingredients that give the impression of being chocolate.

Citrus Zest & Juice

Citrus zest is the rind of the fruit without any of the bitter white pith. Before grating zest from citrus fruit, wash the fruit with warm water and dry it. Be sure to grate the zest before squeezing any juice. Use fresh citrus juice in these recipes.

Eggs

Store eggs in the refrigerator and remember that cold eggs are easier to separate than those at room temperature. Leftover egg whites can be frozen for up to three months. Put them in a clean plastic freezer container and cover the container tightly. Label the container with the date and number of egg whites contained inside. Defrost the covered container of egg whites overnight in the refrigerator. Use egg yolks immediately or discard them.

Flour & Cornstarch

I tested the recipes using either unbleached all-purpose flour or cake flour. Cake flour contains less gluten than all-purpose flour and contributes to the tender texture of cookies. Store flour tightly covered, and keep it dry. Using cornstarch, which has no gluten, in place of some of the flour in shortbread cookie recipes makes for shortbread that is more tender.

Nuts

Nuts are harvested in the fall, so that's a good time to buy them. If stored in a tightly sealed freezer bag or airtight container, nuts can be kept in the freezer for as long as a year. Defrost frozen nuts before adding them to batters; if they're cold, this can affect the baking time and the final product.

Some of the recipes call for toasted nuts. To toast nuts, pre-heat the oven to 325°F/165°C/gas 3. Spread the nuts in a pan or on a baking sheet in a single layer and cook until fragrant and slightly darker in color. Toasting times are as follows: walnuts, pecans, and pine nuts, about 8 minutes; sliced or slivered blanched almonds, about 12 minutes, or until golden; and blanched whole almonds and skinned hazelnuts, about 15 minutes, or until golden. Cashews are typically sold roasted.

It's best to remove the bitter skin of hazelnuts (also known as filberts) before using them. The easiest solution, and what I recommend, is buying skinned hazelnuts. They are usually available at specialty markets. You can also purchase whole skinned hazelnuts and chopped toasted hazelnuts online from King Arthur Flour Company (www.kingarthurflour.com). Otherwise, I find blanching is the easiest way to remove hazelnut skins. To blanch them, fill a saucepan with enough water to cover the hazelnuts, then bring the water to a boil. Add the hazelnuts and boil them uncovered for 5 minutes. Drain the hazelnuts, then

cover them with cold water for several minutes, until cool. Drain them again, then peel them with a small, sharp knife. They will dry out in the oven when they are toasted. If you won't be toasting them immediately, dry them with a clean dish towel and refrigerate or freeze them.

I prefer to chop nuts by hand, with a large, sharp knife, rather than in a food processor, as this allows more control over the size of the chopped pieces. When I list nuts as "finely chopped," I mean about ⅛ in/3 mm in size; by "coarsely chopped," I mean between ¼ in/6 mm and ⅜ in/1 cm in size. For grinding nuts, a food processor fitted with the steel blade works well.

Salt, Baking Powder & Baking Soda

Kosher salt doesn't have additives, and that is the salt I use in all of my recipes. Note that if you substitute table salt, it's best to reduce the amount to about three-quarters or half. (Because table salt has finer crystals, it fills measuring spoons more fully.) Baking powder contains baking soda (which is alkaline), plus an acidic ingredient, and its leavening power is activated when it is combined with a liquid. Double-acting baking powders contain two acid ingredients, one activated by liquid and one activated by heat during baking. I use double-acting, aluminum-free baking powder. Store baking powder tightly covered, and don't use it after the expiration date on the can. Baking soda or sodium bicarbonate is an alkaline leavening that is activated when it is combined with an acid ingredient like sour cream, molasses, or buttermilk. If kept dry, baking soda can be stored indefinitely.

Spices & Extracts

Store spices in tightly covered containers and check that they are fresh by smelling and tasting them. As with chocolate, if a spice tastes good, it will add good flavor to cookies.

Always use pure vanilla extract, not imitation. The same goes for almond extract. Pure almond extract is a little more expensive, but its flavor is worth the additional cost.

TOOLS & EQUIPMENT FOR MAKING COOKIES

As mentioned, the equipment needed for making slice and bake cookies is very basic. It's likely that you already have everything you need. Here are a few recommendations.

Baking Sheets

All of the cookies in this book are baked on the same type of pan: baking sheets that measure about 17 in/43 cm long and 14 in/35.5 cm wide. Use heavy baking sheets with a shiny finish. The test for a heavy baking sheet is that you won't be able to bend it. Heavy aluminum baking sheets are a good choice. They have the advantage of being relatively light in weight, and their shiny finish deflects heat and helps prevent burned cookie bottoms. Plus, aluminum absorbs heat evenly, so your cookies will bake evenly. Rather than being rimmed along all four sides, baking sheets for cookies have curved rims at the ends or on one side for grasping the pan. This design allows cookies to slide off easily. Baking sheets with sides, usually 1 in/2.5 cm high (called jelly roll pans), work fine, but they hold fewer cookies and you can't slide the cookies off the sheet. For efficient baking, I recommend buying at least two, and preferably three, baking sheets.

Double Boiler

A double boiler is convenient for melting chocolate. You can also improvise with a heatproof bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water. Whether you use a double boiler or improvise, be sure the water in the bottom pan isn't in contact with the bowl or pot that contains the chocolate. If chocolate is overheated, it can "seize" and become grainy.

Electric Mixer

A handheld mixer is inexpensive and works well for most cookie doughs, but a stand mixer is a real workhorse and will keep your hands free during mixing.

Knives

You will need a large, sharp knife and a small serrated knife, such as a paring knife or tomato knife, for cutting the dough into slices.

Parchment Paper

I love parchment paper. When you use it, you can forget about greasing pans, forget about cookies sticking to the pan, and forget about washing pans. Just line baking sheets with parchment paper and you're good to go. Discard the paper after the cookies bake.

Utensils

It's useful to have two metal spatulas, one wide and one narrow. A narrow metal spatula comes in handy for spreading glazes and fillings on cookies. A wide metal spatula is essential for moving cookies around. Silicone spatulas are useful for scraping every bit of dough out of the mixing bowl. Accurate measuring is important, and I recommend that you have two sets of measuring spoons, one for dry ingredients and one for liquids, plus a set of dry measuring cups and two liquid measuring cups.

Wire Racks

All of the cookies in this book should be cooled on wire racks. If they remain on the hot baking sheet, they could over-bake or burn. Cooling on wire racks also allows air to circulate around the cookies; this is especially important in ensuring that crisp cookies have the intended texture. As with baking sheets, it's efficient to have at least two wire racks.

MIXING THE COOKIE DOUGH

Most of the cookie doughs in this book are mixed following the same general procedure. Beat the butter and sugar to blend them until smooth, mix in any melted chocolate, and then add any eggs and liquid flavorings. Add the flour or flour mixture and any oatmeal, chocolate chips, fruit, dried fruit, or nuts. That's it. With some doughs, you might notice that adding cold eggs makes the batter looks curdled. This happens when cold eggs are combined with butter at room temperature. What you're actually seeing is small pieces of firm butter. Once the flour is added, the dough will look smooth again.

ASSESSING DONENESS

In my recipes I give several ways to determine whether cookies are baked. Color is one cue. Cookies might be done when the bottoms and edges are golden or when the centers are pale or golden. Another cue is the color of the bottom, which you can check by using a spatula to lift one cookie. That cookie might break, but accurately assessing doneness can save the whole batch. Plus, the baker gets to eat the broken cookies! The tops of chocolate cookies often change from shiny to dull as they near the end of their baking time. Another test is to lightly touch the center of a cookie to see if the center feels firm or soft.

Baking times are only a guideline. They must be approximate because so many factors can affect the amount of time needed. Ovens differ, the thickness of the cookies may differ, and the temperature of the dough might vary, from cold to room temperature. These all affect the time it takes cookies to bake. Cookies have short baking times, and these differences are measured in minutes. Follow the cues given

in each recipe and check cookies often as the end of the baking time nears, and your cookies will turn out fine or, more likely, excellent.

SIMPLE DECORATIONS

Decorating cookies is fun, and it's a great activity to do with children. I spread newspaper on my kitchen floor to catch any spills, put out bowls of glazes and edible decorations (much of the latter is usually eaten before being applied to cookies). I have lots of plain baked cookies ready, such as Any-Holiday Sugar Cookies (page 40) or the cookies from Chocolate and Peppermint-Crunch Cookies (page 56). Creativity reigns, and when we're finished, I just roll up the newspaper, wipe the counter, and cleanup is done.

Some decorations can be added before cookies are baked. Nuts, sugar, or cinnamon sugar can be pressed onto the edges of logs of cookie dough or onto the sliced cookie dough. Chocolate chips and colored sugar can be pressed onto cookies before they bake. However, most decorations are added after cookies bake. Thick powdered sugar glazes, white or in colors, can be piped in a pattern onto cookies. Thin glazes can add shine or be used as glue to attach sprinkles, sugar decorations, small candies, small edible flowers, grated citrus zest, or chocolate shavings.

Dusting the tops of baked cookies with powdered sugar is one of the simplest methods of decoration. I like to take it a step further. Cut a thin strip of wax paper and use it to cover half a cookie or a band down the middle of a cookie, then dust the sugar over the cookie. When you remove the paper, the cookie will be half covered or have stripes of powdered sugar. This looks especially nice on the flat top of chocolate cookies or other dark-colored cookies.

Melted chocolate, in the form of coating (see pages 54 and 56) or ganache (see page 82) is a tasty decoration. Either can be drizzled over the top of cookies. Alternatively, half of the top of a cookie can be swept through either coating or ganache to coat it. White chocolate looks good on chocolate cookies and dark chocolate enhances vanilla or chocolate cookies. White chocolate can be made into a coating or ganache using the same methods as for milk chocolate and dark chocolate.

SERVING COOKIES

For many cookies there's nothing more to serving than lifting them off the baking sheet or out of a cookie jar. But you may sometimes want to arrange cookies, and I do have a few thoughts about that. Choose an assortment of cookies with different shapes, colors, and flavors. Use small platters that are no larger than 12 in/30.5 cm across. Large platters tend to look picked over when some of the cookies are gone. Small platters can be replenished often and look inviting. Arrange the same variety of cookie in a row, section, or circular pattern for an attractive presentation. Heaping cookies in baskets lined with colorful fabric or, for a fancier party, white linen napkins is another idea. The same ideas apply to savory cookies; however, it's best to keep each variety on its own plate or in its own basket so the flavors don't mingle.

STORING COOKIES

If properly packaged, most cookies can be stored perfectly for at least three days after baking. The best way to store cookies is to put them in a plastic container or tin with a tight seal, which protects them from both odors and humidity. Crisp cookies will retain their crisp texture if stored in a tin. It's a good idea to put a piece of wax paper between the layers of cookies, especially if the cookies have soft toppings.

Store each variety of cookie in its own container to prevent them from taking on other flavors. Most cookies can be stored at room temperature, but some frosted or filled cookies should be refrigerated. Each recipe specifies whether the baked cookies should be stored at room temperature or in the refrigerator.

FREEZING COOKIE DOUGH & BAKED COOKIES

Once shaped into logs, slabs, or other forms, cookie dough should be wrapped in plastic wrap and then aluminum foil to protect it in the freezer. Be sure to label each package with the date and its contents. Defrost it in the refrigerator and keep its wrapping on so any condensation forms on the wrapping, not the dough.

Many years ago, I made a great discovery about how to freeze baked cookies and have them taste just-baked, even after two months in the freezer: I wrap several cookies together in plastic wrap before storing them in an airtight container. It takes only a minute or two to wrap up a batch of cookies in these smaller parcels, and it makes a big difference in their flavor and texture, sealing out air in a way that doesn't happen if they're just stacked in a container. Defrost the cookies in the container or wrapped in the plastic to prevent any condensation from forming on the cookies.

TRANSPORTING COOKIES

I'm a cookie courier. Whether I take my cookies around the block or ship them across an ocean, careful packaging is what gets them to their destination in good condition.

Most slice and bake cookies are good candidates for shipping. The only exceptions are those that have fillings or toppings, especially those made with chocolate, that might melt

in warm temperatures; and those with fillings that require refrigeration. Cookies with fillings or toppings that might melt can be sent when the weather is cool.

When shipping cookies, it's important to use plenty of packing material and to double box all packages. Choose rigid plastic containers or tins large enough to hold the cookies. Then find a sturdy carton that will hold the cookie containers. Fill the bottom of the cookie containers with a layer of crumpled wax paper, then wrap the cookies in plastic wrap and stack them in the container. To prevent shifting, put a layer of wax paper between the layers of cookies. Fill any air space with crumpled wax paper and leave enough room to add about 1 in/2.5 cm of crumpled wax paper at the top. Fill the container but don't pack it tightly. Seal the container and tape the lid on to secure it. Wrap the container carefully in bubble wrap or a thick layer of paper (newspaper is fine).

To pack the carton, put a cushioning layer of crumpled newspaper or packing material, such as bubble wrap or packing peanuts, in the bottom. Put the cookie container or containers in the box and add crumpled newspaper or packing material around the containers so they won't shift in the carton. You now have a cushioned container inside a cushioned box. Seal the carton and rest assured that your cookies will travel safely.

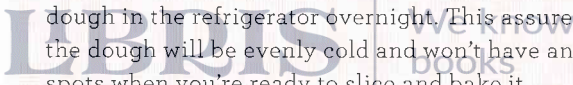
When I carry cookies on an airplane or other public transport, I package them in a container as described for shipping, including taping the lid on securely, and put the container in my carry-on luggage.

SLICE & BAKE COOKIE KNOW-HOW

The dough for all of these cookies is quick and easy to mix, and forming the cookies is as simple as slicing the dough.

As I baked my way through the cookies while developing the recipes, I noticed that they have some common traits. My newfound knowledge helped me be more consistently successful in making the cookies better and making them more quickly. Here's what I learned:

- I found that almost any cookie dough can be formed into a shape and become a slice and bake cookie. If a dough is soft and sticky, chilling will firm it. The only exceptions I encountered were a foamy meringue preparation and a liquid lace cookie batter—cookies that aren't made from a dough.
- When rolling logs of dough, using the palms of your hands rather than your fingers will produce a smoother log. For square logs, rotate the dough and pat it on all four sides to make long flat sides and sharp edges. If the dough is sticky, shape it on plastic wrap (sticky dough will stick to wax paper).
- When a soft dough is formed into a log, it might flatten somewhat during chilling. Refrigerate the log just until it begins to firm up, then roll it back and forth until it has a uniform shape and return it to the refrigerator.
- Doughs that contain melted chocolate firm up quickly—as soon as the chocolate becomes cold. Butter is another ingredient that causes the dough to firm more quickly as it chills.
- Most of these recipes produce two logs or slabs of dough. One piece can be refrigerated and baked over several days and one can be frozen. If refrigerated, bake the cookies within three days. If you like, you can divide each piece of dough for baking smaller batches of cookies. If you do so, be aware that if a baking sheet isn't full, the cookies will probably bake more quickly.

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- The best way to defrost dough is to put the wrapped dough in the refrigerator overnight. This assures that the dough will be evenly cold and won't have any frozen spots when you're ready to slice and bake it.
 - When cold, dough slices evenly, whereas dough at room temperature squishes and loses its shape when cut, and frozen dough is either too hard to slice or may crumble when cut. One exception is the dough for Almond Macaroons (page 28), which must be cut when frozen.
 - Generally, thick slices or pieces of dough produce chewy cookies, and thin ones produce crisp cookies.
 - Cookies that are cut evenly and to the same size will be finished baking at the same time. I use a ruler to measure the first few slices and then try to cut the remaining cookies the same. I never get them exactly even, but I try to keep them as similar as I can. If some cookies are thinner or thicker than others, they may bake more quickly or slowly. You can always use a wide metal spatula to remove thinner cookies and let the rest bake longer.
 - When slicing logs or long square pieces of dough, take care to cut straight down. After cutting several slices, there's a tendency to cut at an angle and produce slices with an uneven thickness. (I speak from experience here.) This will make a cookie that is thinner on one side. This isn't a problem with slabs of dough.
 - For dough that includes hard pieces (such as chocolate chips), if it cracks or a piece breaks off or crumbles during slicing or cutting, put the cookie on the baking sheet and press the pieces together. I form this kind of dough into slabs and usually don't have a problem with cracking.

- Yields may vary a bit, especially depending on the size of the cut cookies. However, knowing the approximate yield will help you make cookies of about the same size and serves as an indication of the number you can expect to have.
- Any of these doughs can be frozen before baking, and all of the cookies can be frozen after they're baked (see page 15).

CHEWY COOKIES

Soft centers and crisp edges—that's what makes a chewy cookie, and what makes them so appealing. These are the folksy, cookie jar classics, such as oatmeal-raisin cookies, chocolate chip cookies, and molasses cookies.

Certain ingredients and dough attributes contribute to making a cookie chewy. Generally, soft dough makes for a soft cookie and firm dough makes for a crisp one. Some of the doughs in this section are quite sticky, and when first mixed will make oddly shaped logs. The solution is to shape them in plastic wrap as best you can, then refrigerate for 15 to 30 minutes. Once chilled, the dough will be firmer, and you can roll it again, still in its plastic wrap.

Fresh and dried fruits and ground nuts add to the texture of chewy cookies. Several of the cookies in this section have chunks of chocolate or regular-size chocolate chips in the dough. If these doughs are formed into a log and sliced, the hard chocolate will make the slices crumble. So this type of cookie dough is patted into a slab and cut into squares. This helps prevent crumbling, and the soft dough miraculously spreads into rounds during baking. Mini chocolate chips don't cause crumbling when the dough is sliced.

SUGAR & SPICE *snickerdoodles*

MAKES 36

Snickerdoodles hail from the Midwest, but the entire United States has adopted these beloved cookies, which are chewy in the middle and, thanks to a cinnamon sugar coating, very crisp on the outside.

MEASURING & MIXING TIME 10 minutes

BAKE AT 350°F/180°C/gas 4 FOR ABOUT 13 minutes

2 ½ cups/315 g unbleached all-purpose flour
2 tsp cream of tartar
1 tsp baking soda
¼ tsp salt
1 ½ cups/300 g sugar
2 tsp ground cinnamon
1 cup/225 g unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 eggs
1 ½ tsp vanilla extract

Sift the flour, cream of tartar, baking soda, and salt into a medium bowl. Set aside.

In a small bowl, stir ¼ cup/50 g of the sugar and the cinnamon together until evenly blended. Set aside.

Put the butter and the remaining 1¼ cups/250 g of sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer and beat on medium speed until smoothly blended, about 1 minute. Stop the mixer and scrape the sides of the bowl as needed. Mix in the eggs and vanilla until blended, about 1 minute. Reduce the speed to low, add the flour mixture, and mix just until incorporated.

Divide the dough into two equal parts. Put each on a large piece of plastic wrap and form into a roughly shaped log 9 in/23 cm long and 1½ in/4 cm in diameter. Sprinkle 1 tbsp of the cinnamon sugar over each log and roll back and forth

to form a smooth, evenly coated cylinder. Wrap in the plastic wrap. Reserve the remaining cinnamon sugar. Refrigerate for at least 3 hours or overnight, until firm, or wrap aluminum foil over the plastic wrap and freeze for up to 2 months.

Frozen dough will be difficult to cut and should be defrosted in the refrigerator for at least 3 hours or overnight first.

When ready to bake the cookies, position a rack in the middle of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350°F/180°C/gas 4. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Use a large, sharp knife to cut each cold log into 18 slices about ½ in/12 mm thick. Place the cookies 3 in/7.5 cm apart on the baking sheets. Sprinkle each with about ¼ tsp of the reserved cinnamon sugar.

Bake the cookies one sheet at a time just until the edges and bottoms are light brown but the centers remain pale, about 13 minutes.

Let cool on the baking sheet for 10 minutes. Use a wide metal spatula to transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

The cookies can be stored in a tightly covered container at room temperature for up to 3 days.

OLD-FASHIONED OATMEAL-RAISIN cookies

MAKES 24

Some cookies are perennial favorites, and oatmeal-raisin cookies are at the top of that list. I'm not one to challenge a classic, but I did want my cookies to include a generous quantity of raisins and plenty of oatmeal for crunch (plus, this sneaks in a bit of extra nutrition).

MEASURING & MIXING TIME **10 minutes**

BAKE AT **350°F/180°C/gas 4** FOR ABOUT **15 minutes**

- 1 ¼ cups/155 g unbleached all-purpose flour
- ¾ tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ cup/115 g unsalted butter, at room temperature
- ¾ cup/150 g firmly packed dark brown sugar
- ¼ cup/50 g granulated sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 ½ tsp vanilla extract
- 1 ½ cups/125 g old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 ½ cups/255 g seedless raisins

Sift the flour, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon into a medium bowl. Set aside.

Put the butter, brown sugar, and granulated sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer and beat on medium speed until smoothly blended, about 1 minute. Stop the mixer and scrape the sides of the bowl as needed. Mix in the egg and vanilla until blended, about 1 minute. Reduce the speed to low, add the flour mixture and rolled oats, and mix just until incorporated. Add the raisins and mix just until evenly distributed.

Divide the dough into two equal parts. Put each on a large piece of plastic wrap and form into a log 6 in/15 cm long and 1¼ in/4.5 cm in diameter. Roll each back and forth to form a smooth cylinder, then wrap in the plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 3 hours or overnight, until firm, or wrap aluminum foil over the plastic wrap and freeze for up to 2 months.

Frozen dough will be difficult to cut and should be defrosted in the refrigerator for at least 3 hours or overnight first.

When ready to bake the cookies, position a rack in the middle of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350°F/180°C/gas 4. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Use a large, sharp knife to cut each cold log into 12 slices about ½ in/12 mm thick. Place the cookies 2 in/5 cm apart on the baking sheets.

Bake the cookies one sheet at a time just until the edges are firm but the centers feel soft if touched lightly, about 15 minutes.

Let cool on the baking sheet for 10 minutes. Use a wide metal spatula to transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

The cookies can be stored in a tightly covered container at room temperature for up to 3 days.