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Little-known Tips for Easy Holiday Baking

By Mimi Cummins

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Are you wondering if you have the time to bake homemade Christmas cookies this year? Every year at about this time we all start to get a little panicked that the holidays are coming up fast and we're not really ready yet. Here are a few little-known tips and tricks, for almost every type of cookie, to help you get the most out of the time you spend baking.

Cutout Cookies

Don't struggle with dough sticking to your rolling pin. Instead, roll out your dough between two sheets of waxed paper. This will eliminate the sticking problem.

Do your cutout cookies always seem to turn out dry, tough, and tasteless? The trick with the waxed paper will help with this. Assuming that you started with a good recipe, the problem is that you are overworking your dough and working too much flour into it. Using the waxed paper will help you to manipulate the dough less, and the dough won't pick up any extra flour.

Refrigerator (Icebox) Cookies and Pinwheels

Ever notice how your roll of icebox or pinwheel cookies gets flat on one side from sitting on the refrigerator shelf? Keep them nice and round by standing them upright in a tall drinking glass while they're chilling.

Do your cookies flatten further when you try to slice them? Try rotating the log 1/4 turn after each slice.

Having trouble with the cookies crumbling as you try to slice them? Start with a log that has been frozen for several hours. Then use a very a very sharp to slice through.

Cookie Press Cookies (Spritz)

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Having trouble getting your cookies to form properly? When your dough doesn't seem to stick properly, put your baking sheet in the freezer for an hour or two, while keeping the dough at room temperature. Then when you press out your cookies onto the frozen sheet, the dough will stick to it just like your tongue sticks to a frozen metal pole when you lick it (assuming you've ever been silly enough to try this).

Don't forget you can pick up your mistakes and put them back into the press.

Bar Cookies

When making bar cookies, create a liner for your baking pan by turning the pan upside-down and covering it with aluminum foil, making sure to form the corners and leaving an overhang of an inch or two. Then, remove the foil, turn the pan right side up, turn the foil over and place it inside the pan. It will

make a perfect liner for your pan. If required by your recipe, grease the liner. Then continue baking your bar cookies as directed. Once baked, you can lift out the entire batch of bars and place it on a cooling rack to cool completely. You can then immediately re-use your baking pan for another batch without having to wait for the previous batch to cool, and you won't have to wash the pan.

All Cookies

Eliminate the need to grease your baking sheets and wash them later by lining them with parchment paper. Parchment paper can be re-used several times and gives excellent results.

Do your cookies seem to brown too much, or cook too fast? Buy a dependable oven thermometer and check your oven temperature. Your oven's internal thermometer may not be accurate. Or, perhaps you are using a non-stick baking sheet or pan. The dark color of the non-stick coating can make your baked goods brown too fast. Try a shiny metal pan instead or lower your oven temperature by 25 degrees.

Are your cookies not browned enough, or take too long to cook? Again, verify the oven temperature. Or, perhaps you're using an insulated baking sheet or pan.

Insulated bakeware can prevent your cookies from reaching the desired temperature in the right amount of time. Try using a non-insulated pan, or raise your oven temperature by 25 degrees.

For more information on minimizing the work involved in holiday baking, consult these articles:

Hassle-Free Holiday Baking: 6 Easy Days to Perfect Christmas Cookies (

)

A Cookie Assembly Line: Efficient Cookie Baking for Busy Cooks (

)

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A pinch of know-how combined with a dash of preparation can make for successful, easy, and stress-free cookie baking every Christmas!

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Mimi Cummins is co-author of the book "Christmas Cookies Are for Giving: Recipes, Stories, and Tips for Making Heartwarming Gifts." This book, "enthusiastically recommended" by Midwest Book Review, is full of baking tips and hints, including nearly 50 recipes each with a full-color photo. For more information visit

or order from your favorite online

bookstore.

[Note to webmasters: you may include a link to the book using your affiliate program (Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or other) if you wish.]

Baking Tips - Easy As Pie

By News Canada

(NC)—The old saying goes "easy as pie", so why are so many of us reluctant to try baking our own? Most of us just don't have the time to spend hours shopping for ingredients, making the pastry from scratch and preparing the filling, especially during the holidays.

Some recognized brand names are making it easy. You can now get, for example, two lines of frozen, unbaked pies - Oven Fresh and the Signature Selections by Sara Lee - that are ready to pop into the oven. Here are some additional hints from Sara Lee for baking all kinds of pies:

- If you make pumpkin pie, watch it carefully. When properly baked, the outer edges of the filling will be firmly set and slightly brown. The four- to six-inch centre circle should have a soft set and shake like gelatine.
- Avoid baking your holiday pie with your turkey or ham. Pies require a higher temperature, so try to bake your pies the night before.
- For a golden brown crust, brush the top of the pie with milk or egg before you put it in the oven. (To avoid burning, be careful not to brush the crimped edge of the crust.)
- To keep edges from burning, place aluminum foil strips around the edges of the pie prior to baking. Remove foil for the last 15 minutes.
- For a high-gloss finish, brush apricot preserves on top of your pie just after baking.
- Always preheat the oven for about 15 minutes at 350° to 375° F, depending on your oven.

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