

Holiday Cookie Decorating



Steinhafels
Relax.



Secrets to sweet success

Little things mean a lot in baking. For best results:

1. Invest in high-quality cookie sheets. At GH, we use heavy-gauge aluminum or heavyweight sheets with a light-colored nonstick finish (available at specialty shops). Cheaper, lightweight sheets can warp; dark-finished ones tend to produce cookies with overbaked bottoms and undercooked tops. If your sheets are old and discolored, you can line them with foil or parchment for even browning.

2. Splurge on butter. It's interchangeable with margarine in some recipes, but for cookies, you get the best flavor and texture with the real thing. Butter also brings out the flavors of other ingredients—spices, nuts, and chocolate. If you do prefer to use margarine, make sure it contains 80 percent fat.

3. Measure ingredients carefully. Even $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon too much baking powder could cause dough to puff and fall; extra flour results in stiff cookies that taste dry. For best results, spoon flour, confectioners' sugar, and cocoa into dry measuring cups, then level off by sweeping across the top with the back of a table knife or metal spatula. Don't pack down unless you're measuring brown sugar, which should be compressed like damp sand.

4. Avoid sticky situations. Dust the work surface

lightly and evenly with flour before rolling, so dough doesn't wrap around the rolling pin or stick to the counter. Rub the rolling pin well with flour as you go. Work with one portion of dough at a time; keep the rest wrapped in the refrigerator.

5. Remember, one size fits all. Use a measuring spoon to scoop up equal portions of dough for even shapes that will all be ready at the same time. For drop cookies, place spoonfuls of dough 2 inches apart unless the recipe directs otherwise.

6. No overcrowding. We prefer baking one sheet of cookies at a time for most uniform results. Place it on the middle oven rack, allowing at least 2 inches of space all around, so the heat can circulate. If you're short on time and must double up, position the racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven; halfway through baking, switch sheets and rotate them from front to back.

7. Check in early. Look at the cookies after the minimum baking time. If they're not ready, stay close for the remainder of time to avoid overbaking. Just a single extra minute can destroy your hard work. Unless a recipe recommends otherwise, cool cookies briefly (about one minute) on the cookie sheet to firm slightly, then transfer to wire racks to cool completely. Cool bar cookies in the pan on rack before cutting.

Cookie-Decorating Tips

Apply a base coat Using stiff frosting and small writing tip, pipe outline of the area on cookie that you want to fill in; let dry. Place a portion of the frosting into a separate bowl and stir in enough water to thin to the consistency of thick paint. With thinned frosting in decorating bag without tip, or in heavy-duty plastic bag with corner cut to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch opening, squeeze frosting into outlined area, left. You can also spread with artists' paintbrushes, small metal spatula, or toothpick (depending on size of area) to fill evenly.

Create a design While the frosting on the base is still wet, pipe a series of parallel or curved lines (using stiff frosting in decorating bag outfitted with small writing tip). Then, working quickly, before frosting dries, draw toothpick or tip of knife through lines to make a second set of equally spaced lines perpendicular to the first set. Wipe the toothpick or your knife clean after drawing each line to ensure a neat appearance of the next line. For a different style, alternate directions when drawing toothpick through lines.

Pipe details Use disposable decorating bag or heavy-duty plastic bag, fitted with small writing tip, to pipe stiff Ornamental Frosting for outline or color details (polyester bags will permanently discolor). For outlines, hold bag at 45-degree angle with tip almost touching cookie. Squeeze bag with steady, even pressure while piping. Stop squeezing before lifting bag. For dots, hold bag at a 90-degree angle with tip slightly above surface. Squeeze bag, without lifting tip, until dot is the desired size. Stop squeezing, then pull bag away.







