

This is my favorite time of year. Number one reason? The cookies! Baking and sharing cookies is guaranteed to spread cheer while bringing yuletide warmth and fragrance to your home. These festive cookies are simple to make, contain no wheat or dairy and can be made egg free. That doesn't mean good taste has been compromised. Here are delicious recipes that are guaranteed to please.

Handcrafted cookies make memorable presents for everyone on your gift list. Put a selection of cookies in colorful containers or arrange them on pretty plates or dishes. Wrap with cellophane and tie with fancy raffia to delight your family, friends and your children's teachers.

'Tis the season to celebrate your special diet. Enjoy Christmas cookies without the allergens. These gluten-free, dairy-free treats deliver the best of flavorful baking traditions and plenty of merry.



Melt-in-Your-Mouth Sugar Cookies

MAKES 24 3-INCH COOKIES

These beautiful cookies are tasty, moist and tender. A family favorite, they're sure to disappear quickly.

- 1½ cups confectioner's sugar
- 1 cup dairy-free, soy-free vegetable shortening
- 1 egg (or 1½ teaspoons egg replacer* mixed with 2 tablespoons rice milk or water)
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2½ cups gluten-free cookie flour mix (page 34)
- ½ teaspoon xanthan gum
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cream of tartar

Icing

- 4 cups confectioner's sugar
- 4 tablespoons dairy-free, soy-free vegetable shortening
- 2 egg whites
- Pinch of salt
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- Food coloring and colored sugars, optional

1. To make cookie dough, place 1½ cups confectioner's sugar and 1 cup shortening in the bowl of an electric mixer and beat

on medium speed until smooth and slightly fluffy.

2. Add egg (or egg replacer mixed with rice milk or water) and vanilla extract. Mix well.

3. In a separate bowl, combine flour mix, xanthan gum, baking soda and cream of tartar.

4. Add flour mixture to sugar mixture, beating on low speed until thoroughly combined.

5. Gather up dough into a ball and chill it for 2 hours.

6. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two cookie sheets with parchment paper.

7. Lightly flour your work surface and rolling pin. Roll out dough to ¼-inch thickness and cut into shapes with your favorite cookie cutters. Using a thin spatula, transfer cookies to cookie sheets. Gather up remaining scraps of dough and roll out again, cutting and rolling until you've used it all.

8. Bake cookies in preheated oven on center rack for 10 minutes. Cool on cookie sheets for 10 minutes before transferring to wire rack.

9. To make icing, combine all icing ingredients and mix until smooth. For colored icing, add a few drops of food coloring.

10. Ice cookies while they're still slightly warm. Then sprinkle immediately with decorative sugars. Cool completely to set.

Each iced cookie contains:

255 calories, 10g total fat, 4g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 9mg cholesterol, 41g carbohydrate, 165mg sodium, 0g fiber, 1g protein

Vegan Icing Variation

For vegan icing, combine 4 cups confectioner's sugar, 4 tablespoons rice milk and 1 teaspoon vanilla extract in a medium bowl. Beat until smooth.

Gluten-Free Cookie Flour Mix

MAKES 6 CUPS

- 4 cups superfine brown rice flour
- 1½ cups potato starch (not potato flour)
- ⅔ cup tapioca flour/starch

Combine all ingredients. Store in the refrigerator until ready to use.