

SUGAR COOKIES

MAKES 2 TO 3 DOZEN COOKIES

Active time: 1½ hr (not including decorating)

Start to finish: 2½ hr

The understated, familiar flavor of these delicate cookies will take you straight back to your childhood.

2½ cups all-purpose flour
¾ teaspoon salt
1½ sticks (¾ cup) unsalted butter, softened
¾ cup sugar
1 large egg
1 teaspoon vanilla

Special equipment: 3- to 4-inch holiday cookie cutters; several small heavy-duty sealable plastic bags (not pleated) if icing cookies

Garnish: decorating icing (optional; recipe follows); food coloring (optional)

► Whisk together flour and salt in a small bowl. ► Beat together butter and sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer at medium-high until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes in a stand mixer or 6 minutes with a handheld. Beat in egg and vanilla. Reduce speed to low and add flour mixture, mixing until just combined.

► Form dough into 2 balls and flatten each into a 6-inch disk. Chill disks, wrapped in plastic wrap, until firm, at least 1 hour.

► Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 350°F.

► Roll out 1 disk of dough (keep remaining dough chilled) into an 8½-inch round (½ inch thick) on a well-floured surface with a well-floured rolling pin. (If dough becomes too soft to roll out, rewrap in plastic and chill until firm.) Cut out as many cookies as possible from dough with cutters and transfer to 2 ungreased large baking sheets, arranging cookies about 1 inch apart.

► Bake cookies, 1 sheet at a time, until edges are golden, 10 to 12 minutes, then transfer to racks to cool completely.

► Meanwhile, gather scraps and chill until dough is firm enough to reroll, 10 to 15 minutes. Make more cookies with remaining dough and scraps (reroll scraps only once) and bake on cooled baking sheets.

► If using icing and coloring it, transfer ¼ cup icing to a small bowl for each color and tint with food coloring. Spoon each color icing into a sealable bag, pressing out excess air, and snip a ½-inch opening in 1 bottom corner of bag. Twisting bag firmly just above icing, decoratively pipe icing onto cookies. Let icing dry completely (about 1 hour)

before storing cookies.

Cooks' notes:

- Dough can be chilled up to 3 days.
- Cookies keep, layered between sheets of wax paper or parchment, in an airtight container at room temperature 1 week.

DECORATING ICING

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

Active time: 15 min Start to finish: 15 min

1 (1-lb) box confectioners sugar
4 teaspoons powdered egg whites (not reconstituted) such as Just Whites (see Shopping List, page 246)
½ cup water
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon vanilla

► Beat together all ingredients in a large bowl with an electric mixer at medium speed until just combined, about 1 minute. ► Increase speed to high and continue to beat until icing holds stiff peaks, about 3 minutes in a stand mixer or 10 minutes with a handheld. If not using icing immediately, cover surface with a dampened paper towel, then cover bowl with plastic wrap.

Cooks' note:

Icing can be made 1 day ahead and chilled, its surface covered with dampened paper towel and bowl covered with plastic wrap.

