

NEWS RELEASE

Jean A. Ince

County Extension Agent-

Staff Chair

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TIPS FOR BAKING HOLIDAY COOKIES

If you haven't started your holiday baking, chances are you will be soon. Cookies are a favorite to make this time of the year. Baking cookies and decorating them with your children makes lots of great memories! Here are some tips for helping to make sure your cookies turn out perfectly every time.

- Use fresh ingredients! Spices, soda, baking powder, shortening do not last forever. For the best flavor, buy new ingredients if you know your supplies are older than one year.
- Get prepared before starting to bake. A great cook gathers all their supplies together before starting to cook. Many recipes call for the butter to be soft. Allow the butter to sit at room temperature for at least 30 minutes before preparing.
- Cream together the butter and sugar, then add dry ingredients. Dry ingredients should be mixed together before adding. Do not overmix. Overmixing causes cookies to be tough.
- Chose the right pan. Cookie sheets should be 2 inches smaller than the inside of your oven. Shiny pans are best. Having 2 cookie sheets is helpful. While one batch is cooking, you can prepare the other sheet to bake.
- Use parchment paper. Parchment paper is great to use instead of greasing the pan. It makes cleanup a breeze!

- Bake cookies in the center of the oven. Often it is best to bake one cookie sheet at a time unless you have a convection oven. Most ovens heat from top and bottom. Convection ovens have a fan, which circulates the heat within the oven. They cook faster and more evenly than traditional ovens allowing multiple pans to be baked at once.
- Cookies bake quickly. Check them when the minimum baking time nears. Crisp cookies are done when they are firm and lightly browned around the edges. Soft cookies are done when the top springs back when lightly touched with the finger.
- Remove cookies from the oven when they are just done. If you are plagued with cookies having tunnels or holes underneath, allow them to sit for a minute or two before removing. Then slip them from the cookie sheet and place on a wire rack to cool.
- Avoid storing soft and crisp cookies in the same cookie jar. The crisp ones will become soft.
- Cookies can be made ahead of time and frozen for later use. Baked cookies can be stored in the freezer from 6 to 8 months. Bake them now, wrap them properly and put in the freezer. Take out what you need as guests arrive.

Nothing says Christmas like homemade cookies. Enjoy baking them this year. For more information on baking or for a handout on baking cookies, contact the Howard County Extension Service at 870-845-7517 or visit our office located on the second floor of the courthouse.

Don't want to bake for the holidays, but would like homemade cookies or cakes? The Howard County Extension Homemakers will be holding a bake sale on Friday, December 17 starting at 8:00 a.m. at the EH Educational Center located behind the courthouse. There will be

lots of items of everything including cookies, cakes, pies, candy, breads, etc. If you have a special request, contact the office and every effort will be made to fill your request. All proceeds go to support Howard County Extension Homemaker Center.

Recipe of the Week

This recipe is by far the best sugar cookie ever! I have fond memories of Mrs. Irene Graves and Mrs. Norma Harrison, who both made these cookies famous. They are great for decorating or wonderful for just melting in your mouth.

Old-Fashioned Sugar Cookies

1 cup sugar

½ teaspoon salt

2 2/3 cups flour

½ teaspoon baking soda

½ cup shortening

½ cup butter

1 egg

3 teaspoons milk

1 teaspoon vanilla or lemon extract

Sift into a large bowl, flour, sugar, salt and soda. Cut in shortening and butter until mixture is like meal. Add egg, milk and vanilla and mix well.

Roll dough out on lightly floured board and cut in desired shapes. Bake on greased (or parchment lined) cookie sheet for 8-10 minutes in a 325°F oven, or until golden brown. Cool completely and decorate if desired.

Note: If dough is too soft, refrigerate dough for about 1 hour before rolling out. Yield 3 ½ to 4 dozen cookies.