

GINGERBREAD COOKIES WITH ROYAL ICING

Makes about 24 cookies

Flourless cooking spray
3¾ cups all-purpose flour plus extra for dusting
2 teaspoons baking soda
1½ teaspoons ground ginger
1½ teaspoons ground allspice
1 teaspoon salt
8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter,
at room temperature
¾ cup tightly packed dark brown sugar
½ cup honey
2 large eggs

Royal Icing (optional, recipe follows)



Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Lightly spray cookie sheets with cooking spray or line them with parchment paper. Sift together the flour, baking soda, ginger, allspice, and salt. Set aside.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream together the butter, brown sugar, and honey on medium speed until smooth, about 2 minutes. Add the eggs and mix until smooth and light, another 2 to 3 minutes. Add the sifted dry ingredients and mix on low speed just until the dough is evenly mixed.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface, pat into an even disk, and chill until firm, at least 10 minutes. Roll out the dough to a ¼-inch thickness. Use 5½-inch cookie cutters to cut out cookies. Transfer to the prepared cookie sheets, spacing them about 1 inch apart.

Bake the cookies until they are firm, about 12 to 14 minutes, depending on size of cutter used. Transfer to wire racks and let cool completely before decorating, if desired. Bake the remaining dough in batches as directed.

Adapted from the CIA's *Baking at Home* cookbook.
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ROYAL ICING

Makes about 1 cup

2 large egg whites

1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar

2 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted

Liquid or paste food coloring(s)
as needed (optional)

In the clean, grease-free bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat the egg whites on low speed just until they become loose, about 1 minute. Add the cream of tartar and continue mixing on low speed until the whites become frothy, about 2 minutes. Add the confectioners' sugar gradually with the mixer on low speed. Continue to mix until the icing holds a soft peak and is dull in appearance, about 2 minutes. The icing is ready to use for piping lines. Or, add a small amount of water until the icing reaches a looser consistency for flooding, or filling in, an outline. If desired, divide the icing among smaller bowls and add coloring(s).

If you won't be using the icing right away, take the following steps to keep the icing from drying out: Clean the sides of the bowl or container to remove any drips; if a dry crust develops on the bowl, small pieces can drop into the icing and clog the tip of your pastry bag or parchment paper cone. Place a dampened paper towel directly on the surface of the icing and then cover the bowl very tightly with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for up to 5 days.

Note: You may prefer to use pasteurized egg whites in this recipe to eliminate any food safety concerns.

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