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the perfect COOKIE

Tried and true tips for bakery-like chocolate chip cookies

BY AMY NICHOL SMITH
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It is an undeniable fact that your mom or your grandmother makes the best chocolate chip cookies you've ever tasted. Nothing will change that. So keep an open mind when you read the next sentence. If you follow all of the instructions below, culled from a series of resources including The New York Times, the original Tollhouse cookie recipe and a variety of nameless, faceless bakers commenting on websites like Chowhound.com and allrecipes.com, you will make the best chocolate chip cookie of your life. Or maybe at least as good as mom's, grandma's or a bakery's big, chewy version.

There are a few tricks bakers keep tucked up their sleeves to ensure perfect, delicious cookies every time.

First, use the highest quality ingredients available to you. That means you should avoid using artificial vanilla and stick to the real stuff. It may cost a few dollars extra, but you'll taste the difference. Same goes for the chocolate.

Make sure all of your ingredients are at room temperature so the butter and sugar will be light and fluffy once creamed, and the eggs will be well incorporated.

This final, crucial step makes the tastiest cookies ever will require an immense amount of patience—you'll have to let the dough rest in the refrigerator for at least



24 hours, and up to three days. Doing so will allow the ingredients to properly meld, yielding a cookie richer in flavor and more even in browning.

If you managed to not eat the entire batch of raw cookie dough, use a large ice cream scoop to portion out the cookies.

You want to use about 1/4 cup of dough per cookie. Also, make sure the dough is cold — this will allow the cookies to rise and not spread out while baking, thus producing a beautiful, bakery-like cookie.

These tips can transform a formerly mediocre cookie into a gooey, chewy, perfect dose of baked bliss — especially if they're hot and fresh out of the oven.

Amy Nichol Smith covers features and entertainment for The Monitor. She can be reached at asmith@themonitor.com and (956) 683-4420.

CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

Ingredients:

- >> 1 cup butter
- >> 1 1/2 cups light brown sugar
- >> 1 cup white sugar
- >> 2 large eggs
- >> 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- >> 2 cup all purpose flour
- >> 1 tsp. baking powder
- >> 1 tsp. baking soda
- >> 1 tsp. coarse salt (and a bit more for sprinkling on top, optional)
- >> 2 cups semisweet chocolate chips

Directions:

Using a mixer on medium speed, cream butter with sugars for 3 to 4 minutes, or until mixture is lighter in color and fluffy. Gently beat eggs into butter and sugar mixture and then stir in vanilla.

Sift all dry ingredients together and then slowly add to wet ingredients. Mix on low just until incorporated. Stir in chocolate chips.

Cover dough with plastic wrap and chill for at least 24 hours, and up to 72 hours. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Using a large ice cream scoop, measure out six balls of cookie dough and place on parchment-lined baking sheets. Sprinkle a little salt on top of each mound of cookie dough if you'd like.

Bake for 15 to 20 minutes (depending on the temperature of your oven). Be sure to not overbake them (they should still be soft in the center). Halfway through the baking time, turn the pan 180 degrees.

Place pan on a wire rack to cool for 10 minutes. Then transfer cookies to wire rack to cool more. Yield: 18 to 24 cookies (depending on size)







COCONUT CREME PIE

Ingredients:

The pie filling and meringue topping are prepared in the microwave.

- >> 3/4 cup sugar
- >> 1/4 cup cornstarch or flour
- >> 3 cups milk
- >> 4 eggs, separated
- >> 1 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- >> 1 tbl. butter
- >> 1 cup coconut
- >> Baked pie shell

Directions:

In a 2-cup glass measuring pitcher or bowl, mix cornstarch and sugar. Add milk and mix. Cook 2 1/2 minutes. Stir every 1 1/2 minutes until thick.

Separate eggs into separate bowls. Set egg whites aside for meringue. Beat egg yolks lightly. Gradually add 1 cup hot milk mixture to yolks to temper. Return all bowl with remaining milk mixture and cook for 2 minutes. Add butter, vanilla and 1 cup coconut. Pour into pastry shell.

MERINGUE TOPPING

Ingredients:

- >> 1 large tbl. cornstarch
- >> 1/4 cup and 2 tbs. sugar
- >> 3/4 cup water
- >> 1/4 cup coconut

Directions:

Combine and mix in a 2-cup glass measuring cup. Cook, stirring each minute, until thick and clear (about 2 1/2 minutes). Then, while beating, gradually pour hot mixture into egg whites. Spread on top of pie. Sprinkle 1/4 cup coconut on top of meringue. Bake 15 minutes at 425 degrees F. Yields 8 servings.

These are just a very few of the good desserts served. I often wonder if we are lured by the game or the "goodies." You can't beat a combination of both. See you later. I'm off to play and eat. Enjoy your week and keep in touch at FoodPate@gmail.com "RoNetta

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