

Crisp Gingerbread Stars

Anne Byrn/Between the Layers

This recipe came out of a food writers' luncheon in the late 1980s. I cannot remember the venue or the rest of the meal, but I fell in love with the cookie, fragrant with orange and deep and dark with cinnamon and ginger. They were crisp and buttery, yet light. And we have always cut the dough into stars. The trick is to bash the dough - not roll - as thinly as you can first. Then roll from the center out to desired thickness. Keep the counter lightly floured, and flip the dough over to prevent it from sticking. Years ago I picked up a set of cookie cutters in graduated sizes of stars. I like to cut stars of all sizes not only because they look like one big star family on the platter but also because people like cookies of different sizes. You have the "I'll eat only one bite" sort of people, and they choose the small stars. And then go back for a second! And then, you have those folks who say bigger is better and want the biggest cookie on the plate. I can relate to both! To decorate, whisk together powdered sugar and enough orange juice to make a smooth and slightly thickened icing. Pour this into a plastic squeeze bottle and once the cookies are cool drizzle the icing over the cookies in zig-zags, or however you like! Let the icing dry before storing.

Makes 5 dozen

Prep: 45 minutes

Bake: 8 to 10 minutes

1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 1/2 cups granulated sugar

1 large egg

4 teaspoons grated orange zest

2 tablespoons dark corn syrup (or molasses or sorghum)

3 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons baking soda

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground ginger

1/2 teaspoon ground cloves

1/2 teaspoon salt

Icing:

2 cups powdered sugar

2 tablespoons orange juice or water, or as needed

1. Place the butter and sugar in a large bowl and beat with an electric mixer on medium speed until creamy and soft. Add the egg, and beat until light and fluffy, 1 minute. Fold in the orange zest and corn syrup until combined. Remove the beaters and set aside.
2. Sift the flour, soda, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and salt into a medium bowl. Fold the flour mixture into the batter with a spatula until combined. Chill dough, covered, at least 2 hours, or overnight.
3. When ready to bake, place a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Lightly flour a work surface and remove the dough from the refrigerator. Scrape about half of the dough onto the work surface. Lightly flour a rolling pin, and firmly tap the dough with the rolling pin until it is about 1-inch thick. Roll out the dough to about 1/4-inch thickness, lightly rolling from the center out to the edges and flipping the dough over every so often so that it does not stick to the work surface. Dust the dough and surface with flour as needed. Cut the dough with star cutters (or the cookie cutter of your choice), pressing firmly down on one stroke. With the help of a metal spatula, transfer the cut-outs to ungreased cookie sheets, placing the cookies about an inch apart. Place the pans in the oven. Keep the remaining dough chilled, press the scraps into a loose ball, and roll the scraps and rest of the dough and cut into shapes.
4. Bake the cookies until they are well browned and crisp, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove the pans from the oven, and let the cookies cool on the pan 1 minute. Transfer them to a wire rack to cool completely.
5. For the icing, whisk together the powdered sugar and orange juice in a small bowl until smooth. Using a knife, spread the cookies with icing, and let it set before eating. Or, pour the icing into a plastic squeeze bottle, and pipe out squiggles, lines, or designs to decorate.