

Peppermint Candy Cane Cookies

Makes about 72 candy cane cookies, 5-inch

Peppermint candy canes are an iconic part of the season. In addition to the hard candy versions that we'll have around, we thought we'd try a cookie version, too! Our candy cane cookies feature a peppermint dough and peppermint icing along with the requisite red and white stripes. We love the burst of chilly, mint flavor in these cookies. They'll stand out on the cookie plate and disappear in a hurry!

Ingredients:

1-1/2 cups (3 sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
1-1/2 cups sugar
2 eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla
1-1/2 teaspoons peppermint extract
5-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt

Directions:

1. In a large bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the butter and sugar together and mix until the consistency is light and fluffy. Add the eggs, and vanilla and peppermint extracts; mix until well blended.
2. Combine the flour and salt in a medium bowl; stir to mix evenly. Add, one-third at a time, to the butter-sugar mixture on low speed until thoroughly mixed.
3. Gather the dough into a rough ball, and divide in half. Flatten each half into an oval shape that's about 1/2-inch thick. (The oval shape will help in the next step of rolling.) Wrap each oval well, and chill for an hour or up to 3 days. The dough may also be frozen at this stage for later use.
4. Remove a dough disk from the refrigerator and allow to soften slightly at room temperature until it rolls out easily to a 1/4-inch thickness using a pastry mat or piece of parchment paper as a rolling surface. Dust with flour as needed, but sparingly so. Re-chill the rolled out dough for 15-20 minutes. Chilling will help cut and retain the detailed shapes in the next step. Repeat with the second disk.
5. Cut out shapes from each chilled, rolled sheet of dough. Place the shapes, leaving space in between each cookie, on a lined baking sheet (lined with a silicone baking mat, or parchment paper), and chill in the refrigerator for 15-20 minutes before baking; this will minimize spreading in the initial baking phase and assist in retaining the detail of the shapes.

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6. Combine scraps from the first cutting of both sheets and roll out again, chill, and cut additional shapes. Repeat until all the dough is prepared. (The less re-rolling of dough, the better it is for a tender cookie).

7. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Bake the chilled, cut-out shapes for 12-14 minutes or until a light fingertip press in the center of the cookie springs back. (For smaller cookies, bake for less time.) Don't allow more than a hint of browning to occur.

8. Allow the cookies to set by cooling on the pan for 5 minutes, then transfer to a cooling rack for completion of the cooling. Cooling on a rack allows the cookies to crisp and resist excess moisture retention that might make them soggy.

9. Once completely cooled, the cookie shapes may be stacked and stored in an airtight container until time to decorate.

Peppermint Cookie Icing

Make about 1-1/2 cups.

(Based on your decorating plan, two batches of icing may be required)

This simple icing works well for both piping and flooding on cookies; it retains a shininess on the finished cookies that we love.

Ingredients:

2-1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
2 tablespoons light corn syrup
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon pure peppermint extract
1 - 2 tablespoons whole milk
Red food coloring

Directions:

1. Sift the powdered sugar into a mixing bowl to remove any lumps or hard pieces
2. Add the corn syrup, vanilla and peppermint extracts, and 1 tablespoon of the milk. Whisk together by hand to combine. (To minimize air bubbles, mix by hand; avoid using a hand mixer or stand mixer for this step).
3. Add additional milk a half-teaspoon at a time until the icing is mixed thoroughly, yet quite stiff.
4. Divide the icing into two separate bowls, one for red, the other white.

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5. ***Piping Icing:*** Both red and white icings will be used to pipe outlines on the candy canes. Add drops of milk until the icing is fluid, yet when drizzled on top keeps the imprint for about 7 seconds; this is known as a 7-second ribbon. Outline cookies and designs with a #4 round tip. Check the consistency of the icing; it should flow nicely and be easy to pipe a line; the line should spread just slightly, but more or less keep its shape.

6. ***Flooding Icing:*** For flooding icing continue to add drops of milk until the consistency is more fluid for flooding. A ribbon of icing on the bowl should take 3-4 seconds to disappear into the surface. Flood the outlined areas or cover tightly until ready to use. A toothpick or the back of a tiny spoon is handy for spreading the icing into corners and reaching all the outlined areas.

7. ***Embellishments:*** Add embellishments to flooded areas as desired. The icing pattern may be accomplished in a variety of ways – outline and flood with white and add red stripes, or outline and flood with red and add white stripes. With the latter strategy, it's fun to add food glitter or sprinkles to the white stripes.