Chewy Chocolate Gingerbread Cookies

Makes 2 dozen

Soft yet chewy. Spicy yet loaded with chocolate. That's what I call a great cookie. This was chosen as a favorite recipe in Martha Stewart Living magazine a few years back, and Stewart says it's become a "cult favorite" among her readers.

— Margie Helton

- **7 ounces semisweet chocolate**
- **1½ cups plus 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour**
- **1¼ teaspoons ground ginger**
- **1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- **¼ teaspoon ground cloves**
- **¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg**
- **1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa**
- **8 tablespoons unsalted butter (1 stick; see note)**
- **1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger**
- **½ cup firmly packed dark brown sugar**
- **¼ cup unsulfured molasses**
- **1 teaspoon baking soda**
- **1½ teaspoons boiling water**
- **¼ cup granulated sugar**

Line 2 baking sheets with parchment. Chop chocolate into ¼-inch chunks; set aside.

In a medium bowl, sift together flour, ground ginger, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and cocoa. Set aside.

In the large bowl of an electric mixer, beat the butter and grated ginger until the color lightens, about 4 minutes. Add the brown sugar and beat until combined. Add molasses and beat until combined. Set aside.

In a small bowl, dissolve the baking soda in boiling water. Set aside.

Beat half of the flour mixture into the butter mixture. Beat in the baking soda mixture, then the remaining half of the flour mixture.

Mix in the chocolate, and turn out onto a piece of plastic wrap. Pat the dough out to about 1 inch thick. Seal with plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm, 2 hours or more.

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

Roll the dough into 1½-inch balls and place 2 inches apart on baking sheets. Refrigerate 20 minutes.

Roll the balls in granulated sugar. Bake until the surfaces crack slightly, 13 to 15 minutes; let cool 5 minutes; transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

Note: Use real butter or stick margarine. Do not substitute reduced-fat spreads; their higher water content often yields less-satisfactory results.

— From Martha Stewart Living magazine

Luscious Apricot Bars

Makes 32 bars

I received this recipe from Wanda Phipps, a coworker more than 25 years ago at Oregon State University Extension Service. It became a favorite of my daughter, Heidi.

— Sharon Maasdam

- **⅔ cup dried apricots**
- **½ cup butter, at room temperature (1 stick; see note)**
- **¼ cup granulated sugar**
- **1⅓ cups all-purpose flour (divided)**
- **½ teaspoon baking powder**
- **¼ teaspoon salt**
- **1 cup firmly packed brown sugar**
- **2 eggs**
- **1 teaspoon vanilla**
- **½ cup chopped walnuts**
- **◆ Powdered sugar**

Cover apricots with water in a small saucepan; boil 10 minutes. Drain, cool and chop.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease an 8-by-8-inch baking pan.

In a large mixer bowl, beat butter, granulated sugar and 1 cup flour on low until crumbly. Press into pan. Bake 20 minutes or until edges just begin to turn light brown.

In a small bowl, combine remaining ⅓ cup flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside.

With mixer at low speed, gradually beat brown sugar into eggs. Add flour mixture, then vanilla. Stir in walnuts and plumped apricots. Spread over baked layer.

Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until it begins to come away from sides of pan and is firm in middle. Cool in pan. Cut into 1-by-2-inch bars, then roll bars in powdered sugar.

Note: Use real butter or stick margarine. Do not substitute reduced-fat spreads; their higher water content often yields less-satisfactory results.

— From "Ophir Grange Cookie Cookbook" Curry County Grange, 1954

Chocolate Refreshers

Makes 5 dozen cookies

This is a sophisticated cookie that comes from my mother's recipe box. Every time I bake these wonderful bars, it takes me back to my childhood, when I looked forward to my grandfather coming to our house for Sunday dinner. They were his favorite. These are not just a holiday favorite in our house, but are enjoyed year-round.

— Cheri Swoboda

- **1¼ cups all-purpose flour**
- **¾ teaspoon baking soda**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **1¼ cups whole dates**
- **¾ cup firmly packed brown sugar**
- **½ cup water**
- **½ cup butter (1 stick; see note)**
- **1 cup semisweet chocolate chips (one 6-ounce package)**
- **2 eggs**
- **½ cup orange juice**
- **½ cup 2 percent milk**
- **1 cup chopped walnuts**
- **◆ Orange Glaze (recipe follows)**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 15-by-10-by-1- inch baking pan.

Sift flour with baking soda and salt. Set aside.

Combine dates, brown sugar, water and butter in a large pot. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly until dates are soft. Remove from heat, stir in chocolate chips. Beat in eggs. Add dry ingredients alternately with orange juice and milk. Blend thoroughly. Stir in walnuts. Spread in prepared pan and bake 20 to 25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Cool and frost with glaze. Cut in bars.

Note: Use real butter or stick margarine. Do not substitute reduced-fat spreads; their higher water content often yields less-satisfactory results.

Orange Glaze

- **1½ cups powdered sugar**
- **2 tablespoons butter, softened**
- **1 to 2 teaspoons grated orange zest**
- **2 to 3 tablespoons half-and-half or whipping cream**

Mix together powdered sugar, butter and zest. Add half-and-half until you reach desired consistency.

Lacy Chocolate Oatmeal Cookie Sandwiches

Makes about 30 sandwiches

These delicate cookies are as delicious as they are fragile. And sandwiching them with chocolate makes them even more luscious.

— Nick Malgieri

- **8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted (1 stick; see note)**
- **1 cup oatmeal (not instant), finely chopped, but not ground to a powder, in the food processor**
- **1 cup granulated sugar**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **1 egg**
- **2 teaspoons vanilla**
- **6 ounces semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, melted and cooled**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cover 3 or 4 cookie sheets or jellyroll pans with buttered foil.

Pour melted butter into a bowl. One at a time, stir in oatmeal, sugar, salt, egg and vanilla, stirring smooth after each addition.

Use a ½-teaspoon measure to drop batter onto prepared pans. Leave about 3 inches around each one to allow room to spread.

Bake for about 8 to 10 minutes, or until they have spread and are brown around the edges and lighter brown toward the center. Slide the foil onto racks to cool.

When cookies are completely cool, peel them off the foil and arrange half of them bottom side up on a pan. Use a small offset spatula to spread about ½ teaspoon of melted chocolate on the bottom of a cookie. Top with another cookie, bottom to bottom.

Store finished cookies between sheets of parchment or wax paper in a tin or plastic container with a tightfitting cover.

Note: Use real butter or stick margarine. Do not substitute reduced-fat spreads; their higher water content often yields less-satisfactory results.