

Sugar Cookie Dough

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup unsalted butter, softened
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vegetable shortening
1 cup granulated sugar
2 oz. cream cheese
1 egg
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 tsp. almond extract
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. salt

1. Cream together butter, shortening, sugar and cream cheese.
2. Add egg and both extracts to butter mixture until well incorporated.
3. Combine last 3 ingredients, and then slowly add them to the wet mixture. Mix until well incorporated.
4. Chill dough at least 1 hour, or overnight.
5. Bake at 350° for 8 to 12 minutes. Remove at first indication of edges turning brown.

Royal Icing

1 cup water
5 Tbsp. meringue powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. almond extract
1 Tbsp. light corn syrup
2 lb. powdered sugar

1. Mix water and meringue powder in a metal or glass bowl until frothy.
2. Add almond extract, corn syrup and powdered sugar to mixture and beat until bright white and fluffy. It can take 5 minutes or more to reach this stage.
3. Keep covered with plastic wrap or a damp cloth, as this icing dries out quickly.

Bernard's Baking Tips

- I put my cookie dough into 1-gallon zip-top plastic bags to chill.
- Use silver-colored baking sheets without edges.
- Decorating the baked cookies the next day is ideal—if not, try to wait at least a few hours after they've come out of the oven.
- Meringue powder is available at cake decorating stores and hobby and craft stores. But you can substitute fresh egg whites if you like—just use equal amounts of egg whites and water.

