

# JUST DESSERTS

Lovers of desserts agree — you can never have too many Christmas cookies. For, the cookie is a culinary art form which is at-once sophisticated and comforting.

The ingredients which can be incorporated into the cookie are virtually unlimited. Favorites include chocolate, nuts, a myriad of dried fruits, and fragrant spices whose aroma epitomizes the entire happy bustle of the holiday season.

The Christmas cookie jar includes cookies which have been iced, decorated with colored sugars, even with gilt or silver foil.

They are formed by dropping, by rolling and cutting into elaborate shapes, by baking in a jelly-roll pan and cutting into bars, by shaping into delicate crescents, by twisting into pretzels — whatever, in fact, an enthusiastic imagination dictates.

While cookies are certainly a kid's delight, they are equally certain to appeal to grown-ups, too, bringing out the lurking child inside every otherwise staid adult. And the cookie recipes included below, traditional or otherwise, are certainly no exception!

Pepper Nuts, reproduced from *Celebrations* (Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc.) by Diana and Paul von Welanetz, are holiday favorites which hail from Germany, Sweden and Denmark.

Fragrant with cloves, cinnamon, allspice and cardamom, they take their name from the inclusion of freshly ground black pepper, the ingredient that gives them their special bite. They travel well, and can and should be made in advance, as aging improves their flavor and texture.



## PEPPER NUTS FOR ABOUT 4 DOZEN COOKIES

- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons ground almonds
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 cups sifted all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- A piece of apple to place in the tin while the cookies age
- Powdered sugar (garnish)

In the large bowl of an electric mixer beat the egg with the brown and white sugar until thick and fluffy. Add the almonds and spices and mix well.

Sift flour with baking soda and add to the flour mixture — the dough will be stiff. Form into a log about 1-inch in diameter, wrap in plastic wrap or foil, and refrigerate for 2 to 3 days so the flavors will fully develop.

Preheat oven to 300°F and place rack in center position. Butter a large baking sheet. Cut crosswise slices of dough about 1/4-inch thick and place, cut side flat, on baking sheet. Bake for 20 minutes or so until lightly browned. Remove from baking sheet and cool completely. Roll in powdered sugar before serving.

*To Prepare in Advance:* These are best when aged for at least a week in an airtight tin with a slice of apple.

Another spicy holiday cookie is the Hermit, which is also excellent for shipping. The recipe for Hermit here is reproduced from *Cookies* (Harmony Books) by Diane Rozas & Rosalee Harris, a cornucopia of cookie recipes that can be enjoyed all year round.



## HERMITS

Makes 45 to 50 cookies

- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon grated nutmeg
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 6 ounces (1 1/2 sticks) butter
- 1 1/2 cups packed light brown sugar
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 1/2 cups chopped walnuts
- 1 cup dark raisins
- 1 cup golden raisins or currants

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Butter cookie sheets.

2. Sift the flour, baking soda, salt, nutmeg and cinnamon together.

3. Cream the butter and sugar until light and smooth; beat in the eggs until well blended.

4. Stir the dry ingredients into the creamed mixture until thoroughly combined; mix in the walnuts and raisins.

5. Using 2 teaspoons, drop the batter by round spoonfuls, 2 inches apart, onto the buttered cookie sheets. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, or until the cookies are golden brown. Cool on racks.

Also from *Cookies* is the following recipe for Almond Pretzels, which can be varied by dipping in melted chocolate for a taste sensation that's sure to please.

The pretzel shape, because it is related to pagan symbols of the winter solstice which scholars speculate were metamorphosed into the Cross, is particularly appropriate during the holiday season.

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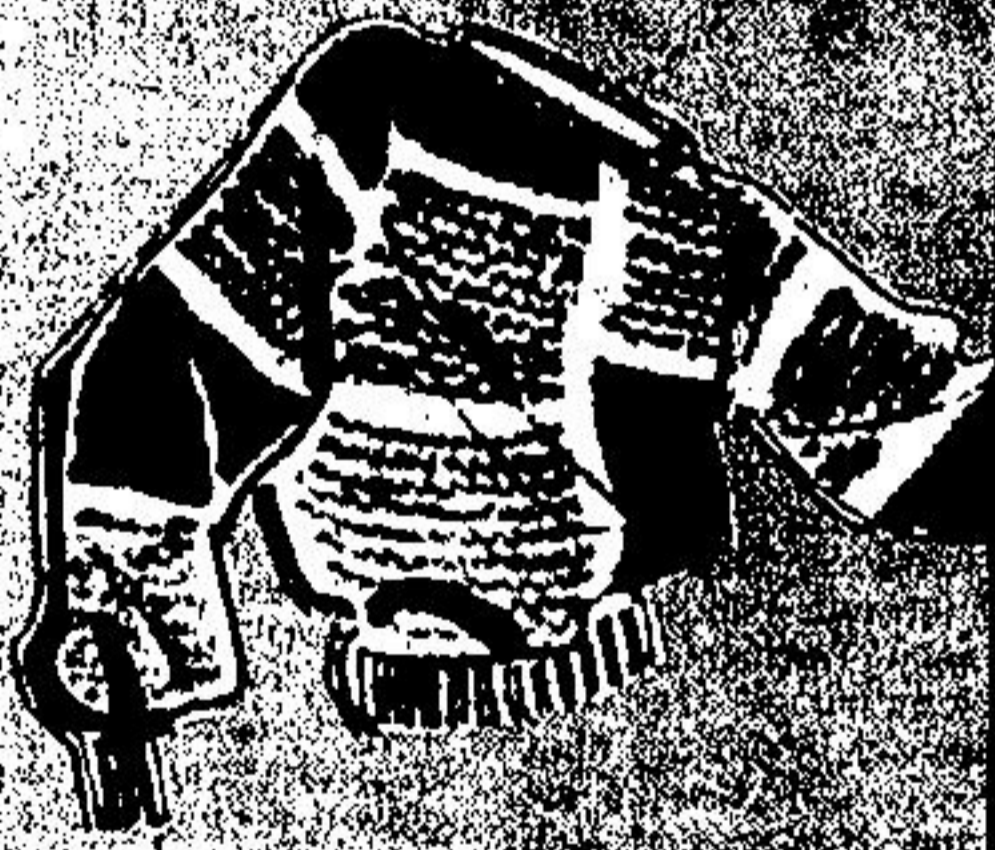


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