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Make party morsels that melt in your mouth

Only the richest of butters is acceptable when it comes to our expectations of holiday shortbread. In fact, the taste of premium butter is so important to party baking, all lesser substitutes inevitably fail.

Before you begin, take a look online at www.gaylea.com for Shortbread Inspirations, a collection of over 20 sweet and savoury shortbread recipes, alongside valuable baking tips and entertaining ideas. Here, from the collection, are some of this year's indescribable morsels, including a buttery hors d'oeuvre with rich cheese and tangy sour cream:

Stained Glass Cookies

- 2 cups (500 ml) Gay Lea butter, unsalted and softened
- 1 cup (250 ml) fruit or granulated sugar
- 1 tsp (5 ml) vanilla extract
- 3 cups (750 ml) all-purpose flour
- 1 cup (250 ml) cornstarch or rice flour
- 1 tsp (5 ml) salt
- 1 50g-package hard candies, different colours

Using electric mixer, beat butter until very creamy. Gradually beat in sugar, beating until very light and fluffy. Beat in vanilla.

In separate bowl, combine flour, cornstarch and salt. In four additions, using a wooden spoon, stir flour mixture into butter mixture, stirring well between each addition. Transfer dough to floured surface; knead gently for 3 minutes until shortbread holds together well. Divide into three balls. Wrap each ball with plastic wrap; flatten into discs and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Remove plastic wrap from one piece



of dough. Flour work surface well and knead dough lightly for 30 seconds. Re-flour surface and top of dough. Roll out dough until 1/4" (5 mm) thick, constantly rotating to make sure it's not sticking to the surface and lightly dusting the top of the dough with flour. Cut out shapes, using a cookie cutter. Makes 4-1/2 dozen cookies.

Using small pastry tips, cookie cutters, tips of drinking straws or hors d'oeuvres cutters, cut out small holes or shapes in cookies. Transfer to parchment-paper lined cookie sheets. Chill for 30 minutes or up to 8 hours. Bake for 5 minutes in preheated 325F (160C) oven.

Meanwhile, crush hard candies, keeping colours separate. Spoon candy lightly into prepared holes. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes or until dough is firm, underside is golden and candy is melted. Cool on pan on racks.

To use these as ornaments or as part of a garland, cut out hole in top of cookie— before baking— using drinking straw. Upon removal from oven, make sure hole is large enough to draw string through. Let cool completely before hanging.

—News Canada

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