

DECK THE HALLS WITH COLORFULL CREATIONS

Memorable holidays start at home with bustling preparations for festive gatherings and the traditional aroma of baking for the season. Now even the busiest families can find time for these activities. Plan ahead and have everyone join in the fun of preparing decorative and delicious goodies to adorn the home.

Add excitement to holiday entertaining with a beautiful Sugar Plum Tree or Ornament Cookies. Both can be made from one basic recipe. What's more, the undecorated cookies can be baked ahead and frozen until you're ready to use them.

Get the children involved. Let them help cut out the cookies and then do the last minute decorating. "M&M's" Chocolate Candies make it fun and easy, providing instant gaily-colored and artistic accents when arranged on frosted cookies, as well as adding a delicious milk chocolate flavor. Once assembled, use the Sugar Plum Tree as a distinctive centerpiece, or trim your tree with elegant Ornament Cookies.

Another specialty for the holidays is the Spirited Fruit Cake flavored with brandy, almonds and a variety of dried and candied fruits. Make it several weeks in advance since it will be more flavorful if allowed to age. Glaze with a brandy icing and garnish just before serving. It's the perfect complement to coffee when friends drop in.

Cookies, like the classic fruit cake, are an important part of the holidays. Among these are Merry Cherry Bars, a moist bar cookie with a mild almond flavor and topped with a sprinkling of red and green. Drizzled with a shimmering glaze, these look festive when piled on a plate.

For more nibbling and gift-giving, bake a selection of other cookies, too. Rich Nutty Buttery Gems are spiked with rum, if desired, and dressed up with red or green candied cherries. These keep well in the freezer till friends stop in. Marvel Bars are glistening beauties which combine a variety of festive ingredients in a chewy-moist mouthwatering delight. And, to round out the old-time favorites, add Sugar 'N Spice Snaps, a crispy spicy cookie covered with a sprinkling of confectioners' sugar.

These colorful creations will surely decorate and adorn the home as well as provide delicious treats for the table.

SUGAR PLUM COOKIE TREE

STAR COOKIES	GLAZE
1-1/2 cups butter or margarine	4 egg whites
3 cups granulated sugar	9 cups sifted confectioners' sugar
3 eggs	2 teaspoons vanilla
3 teaspoons vanilla or	6 to 7 tablespoons hot water
1-1/2 teaspoons almond extract	Green food coloring
6 cups flour	
4-1/2 teaspoons baking powder	DECORATION
1-1/2 teaspoons salt	1/2 cup green "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies, cut in half*
3 tablespoons milk	Silver dragees

For star cookies, beat together butter and sugar until light and fluffy; blend in eggs and vanilla, mixing well. Gradually add combined dry ingredients alternately with milk, mixing well after each addition. Divide dough into six portions; wrap each securely. Chill 2 to 3 hours or until firm enough to roll out. Roll out dough, one portion at a time, directly onto ungreased cookie sheet to 1/8-inch thickness. Repeat with each portion of dough, cutting out 2 cookies from each size star pattern, making total of 18 star-shaped cookies. Remove excess dough each time from around star; chill thoroughly before rolling again to 1/4-inch thickness for circles. Cut out three 3-inch circles, eight 2-inch circles, and five 1-1/2-inch circles with round cookie cutters or sharp knife. Bake all shapes of cookies at 350°F. for 10 to 12 minutes or until edges are a light golden brown. Remove from oven; immediately cut 3/4 to 1-inch hole in the center of each star and each circle except in one small star and circle. Remove cookies to wire rack; cool thoroughly.

For glaze, beat egg whites until foamy, gradually adding sugar. Add vanilla and 1 tablespoon water at a time, beating until glaze is thick and of spreading consistency. (Glaze should be smooth when spread with spatula.) Remove 1-1/2 cups glaze; cover with damp cloth and set aside. Add 3 to 4 drops green food coloring to remaining 2-1/4 cups glaze; mix well. (Add a few drops water if glaze thickens.)

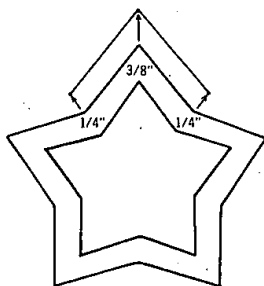
To decorate and assemble tree, frost each star and circle with green glaze; let dry. Drizzle white glaze over edges of each star; decorate star with candies and silver dragees securing with additional glaze.

To make tree stand, secure 1/2-inch wooden dowel rod, cut 12 inches long, into the center of 10-inch round by 1/2-inch thick wooden or heavy cardboard base. Frost top and side of base with white glaze; let dry.

To assemble tree, slip largest star over dowel followed by largest circle. Continue alternating stars and circles in order of decreasing size, ending with smallest star. Top with solid star or circle. Makes one 12 to 13-inch cookie tree.

*NOTE: One 16-oz. pkg. "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies yields about 1/2 cup green candies.
**NOTE: To make the seven additional star patterns, measure 1/4-inch out from the indentations and 3/8-inch out from the points of the star on the pattern above. Draw lines connecting points to make star-shape; repeat seven times to make increasing size patterns.

VARIATION: For ORNAMENT COOKIES, divide star cookie and glaze ingredients in half. Substitute orange juice for milk; omit vanilla. Stir in 1 tablespoon grated orange rind, if desired. Chill as directed. Roll out dough directly onto ungreased cookie sheet to 1/8-inch thickness. Cut with floured 3 to 4-inch assorted Christmas shaped cookie cutters. Bake at 400°F. for 7 to 9 minutes or until edges are light golden brown. Immediately make a hole with wooden pick or straw at the top of each cookie. Cool as directed above. Prepare glaze; divide and tint with food coloring, as desired. Frost cooled cookies with glaze; decorate with whole or halved "M&M's" Chocolate Candies and silver dragees, as desired. Makes about five dozen 3-inch cookies or about three dozen 4-inch cookies.



SPIRITED FRUIT CAKE

CAKE	GLAZE
2-1/2 cups golden raisins (about 15 oz.)	6 eggs
1-3/4 cups chopped dried or candied apricots (about 10 oz.)	4 cups flour
1-3/4 cups chopped candied pineapple (about 10 oz.)	1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup brandy	3/4 cup milk
1-1/2 cups butter or margarine	3 cups coarsely chopped blanched almonds, lightly toasted
2 cups sugar	
1 teaspoon vanilla	

For cake, combine raisins, apricots, pineapple and brandy; let stand about 30 minutes. Beat together butter, sugar and vanilla until light and fluffy; continue beating eggs in one at a time. Gradually add combined flour and salt alternately with milk, mixing well after each addition. Stir in nuts and fruit mixture. Spoon batter into greased 10-inch tube pan. Bake at 275°F. for 3 hours or until wooden pick inserted in center of cake comes out clean. Cool thoroughly on wire rack. Remove from pan. (If desired, moisten as directed below.**) Wrap securely; refrigerate to store.

For Glaze, combine confectioners' sugar, water and brandy; mix until smooth. Drizzle over cake; garnish top as desired. Makes one 10-inch fruit cake.

*NOTE: To moisten cake in brandy: Wrap unglazed cake in cheese cloth cut 4-ft. in length and doubled, that has been moistened in 3 tablespoons brandy. To store, wrap brandy moistened cake securely in aluminum foil; place in refrigerator. Repeat moistening of cheesecloth with 2 to 3 tablespoons brandy once a week for up to, but not longer than 3 weeks, if desired. Glaze as directed to serve.

MERRY CHERRY BARS

1 cup butter or margarine	1/3 cup coarsely chopped green "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies*
1 cup granulated sugar	
1 egg	
1/2 teaspoon almond extract	1 cup sifted confectioners' sugar
2 cups flour	
1/4 teaspoon salt	5 teaspoons warm water
3/4 cup coarsely chopped red candied cherries	

Beat together butter and sugar until light and fluffy; blend in egg and almond extract. Add combined flour and salt; mix well. Stir in 1/2 cup cherries. Spread dough into greased 15-1/2 x 10-1/2-inch jelly roll pan. Sprinkle with remaining 1/4 cup cherries and candies; press in lightly. Bake at 300°F. for 30 to 35 minutes or until edges are very lightly browned. Cool thoroughly. Combine confectioners' sugar and water, mixing until smooth. Drizzle over cherry-candy topping; cut into bars to serve. Makes one 15-1/2 x 10-1/2-inch pan of bars.

*NOTE: One 16-oz. pkg. "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies yields about 1/2 cup green candies.

NUTTY BUTTERY GEMS

1 cup flour	2 tablespoons rum
1/2 cup butter or margarine	2/3 cup coarsely chopped pecans or walnuts
1/4 cup sugar	
1/4 teaspoon salt	24 whole candied cherries, or pecan or walnut halves
1 egg, separated	

Combine flour, butter, sugar, salt, egg yolk and 1 tablespoon rum; mix well. Cover; chill dough 1 to 2 hours or until firm enough to shape into balls. Beat egg white with remaining 1 tablespoon rum until foamy. Shape dough to form 3/4-inch balls. Dip into egg white mixture; roll in nuts. Place balls about 2 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheet. Make indentation in center of each cookie ball; press in cherry or nut. Bake at 350°F. for 13 to 15 minutes or until edges are very lightly browned. Immediately remove to wire rack; cool thoroughly. Makes about 2 dozen cookies.

MARVEL BARS

1/2 cup butter or margarine	1/4 teaspoon soda
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar	1 cup quick oats, uncooked
1 egg	1/2 cup chopped nuts
2 tablespoons orange juice	2/3 cup chopped "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies
1-1/2 cups flour	1/2 cup orange marmalade or apricot preserves
1 teaspoon baking powder	1/4 cup flaked coconut
1/2 teaspoon salt	

Beat together butter and sugar until light and fluffy; blend in egg and orange juice. Add combined flour, baking powder, salt and soda; mix well. Stir in oats, 1/4 cup nuts and 1/3 cup candies. Spread half dough (about 1-1/2 cups) onto bottom of greased 13 x 9-inch baking pan. Spread combined marmalade, remaining 1/4 cup nuts and coconut over top of dough. Drop remaining dough by rounded teaspoonfuls over marmalade mixture; sprinkle with remaining 1/3 cup candies. Bake at 350°F. for 25 to 30 minutes or until golden brown. Cool thoroughly; cut into bars to serve. Makes one 13 x 9-inch pan of bars.

SUGAR 'N SPICE SNAPS

3/4 cup butter or margarine	2 teaspoons soda
1 cup granulated sugar	1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 egg	1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
1/4 cup molasses	1/4 teaspoon salt
2 cups flour	Sifted confectioners' sugar

Beat together butter and sugar until light and fluffy; blend in egg and molasses. Add combined flour, soda, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt; mix well. Cover; chill dough 1 to 2 hours or until firm enough to shape into balls. Shape to form 3/4-inch balls; place 2 inches apart on greased cookie sheet. Bake at 350°F. for 8 to 10 minutes or until edges are light golden brown. Remove from cookie sheet; cool slightly. Sprinkle warm cookies heavily with confectioners' sugar. Makes about 6 dozen cookies.