

Let Kids Bake Cookie Ornaments For a Special Tree

Host a cookie baking and decorating party for your kids (or grandkids) and a few of their friends, and you're likely to start a new holiday tradition. The kids will enjoy hours of creative fun, and you'll have a one-of-a-kind Christmas tree adorned with homemade cookie ornaments.

From the invitations to the entertainment, this kid-pleasing party can be accomplished easily. Here's how.

Make It Inviting

Depending on the children's ages, set aside two to three hours on a weekend afternoon. It's also a good idea to limit the guest list to a size your kitchen can handle.

Put your kids in charge of the invitations. Younger children can decorate plain white postcards with holiday stickers while an older sibling writes the details: a cookie baking party, on December 17, in Santa's Bake Shop, at your address.

Party Favors
Child-size aprons in red or green will be a hit, and they can be taken home. Or, fill holiday goody bags with stickers, foil stars and glitter crayons. An instant photo of each child elbow deep in frosting and sprinkles will add to the memories.

CHRISTMAS COOKIE ORNAMENTS

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter or margarine, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup Quaker oats (quick or old fashioned, uncooked)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (optional)

Beat together butter, sugar and vanilla until creamy. Add combined flour, oats and salt; mix well. Divide dough in half. Shape each portion of dough into a roll, about 2 inches in diameter. Wrap in plastic wrap; chill about 3 hours.

Heat oven to 350F. Unwrap rolls and cut into 1/4-inch slices. Place

about 1 inch apart on ungreased cookie sheet. Poke hole at top of each cookie with drinking straw before baking. (Repeat immediately after baking if hole closes.) Bake 11 to 13 minutes or until edges are light golden brown. Cool 1 minute on cookie sheet; remove to wire rack. Cool completely. Insert candy licorice string or narrow ribbon through hole of decorated cookie. Tie ends together.

Nutrition Information: One undecorated cookie: Calories 90, Fat 5g, Sodium 50mg.

Decorating Ideas:

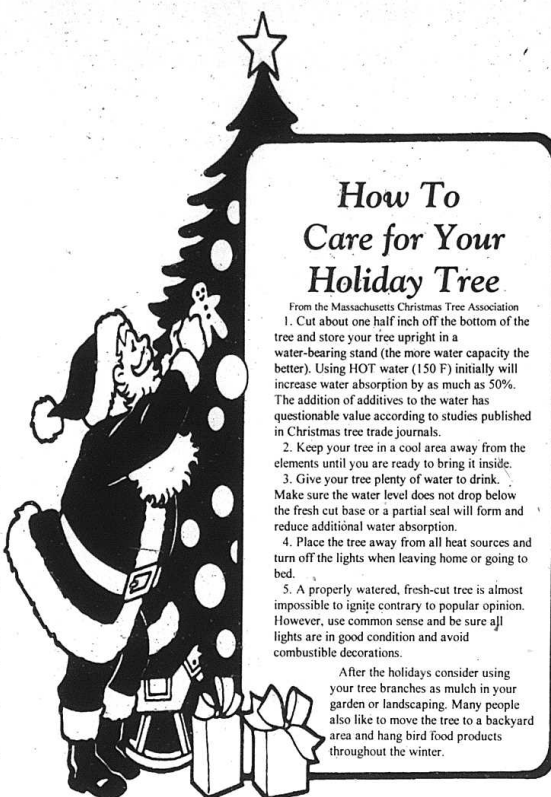
Holiday Gem Cookies: Decorate cooled cookies with purchased decorating icing and small holiday candies.

Glitter Cookies: Sprinkle cookie slices with colored sugar crystals before baking.

Sugar-Coated Ornaments: After shaping dough into rolls, coat with red or green sugar crystals, nonpareils or small holiday sprinkles before refrigerating. Slice; poke hole at top of cookies and bake as directed.

Christmas Trees: Tint each portion of dough with green food coloring. Shape roll into triangle by flattening sides. Refrigerate and cut into slices as directed. Cut small squares for tree trunks from several slices and attach to trees on cookie sheet. Poke hole at top of trees and bake as directed. Attach small candies to cooled cookies with purchased decorating icing, if desired. Or, sprinkle cookies with green sugar crystals before baking.

Heavenly Angels: Cut each slice in half, forming half circles. Place half circles on cookie sheet so round edges touch. Make heads by rolling small portions of dough into balls; gently press between tops of wings. Puncture holes at tops of each wing and bake as directed. Decorate as desired.



How To Care for Your Holiday Tree

From the Massachusetts Christmas Tree Association

1. Cut about one half inch off the bottom of the tree and store your tree upright in a water-bearing stand (the more water capacity the better). Using HOT water (150 F) initially will increase water absorption by as much as 50%. The addition of additives to the water has questionable value according to studies published in Christmas tree trade journals.
2. Keep your tree in a cool area away from the elements until you are ready to bring it inside.
3. Give your tree plenty of water to drink. Make sure the water level does not drop below the fresh cut base or a partial seal will form and reduce additional water absorption.
4. Place the tree away from all heat sources and turn off the lights when leaving home or going to bed.
5. A properly watered, fresh-cut tree is almost impossible to ignite contrary to popular opinion. However, use common sense and be sure all lights are in good condition and avoid combustible decorations.

After the holidays consider using your tree branches as mulch in your garden or landscaping. Many people also like to move the tree to a backyard area and hang bird food products throughout the winter.

What is Christmas Without a Special Tree?

HERSHEY, Pa. - With the hectic and busy Christmas season just around the corner, what better way to save time and get into the spirit of the holidays than to prepare an Easy Christmas Tree Cake, a perfect dessert and centerpiece for any holiday gathering or party.

This Christmas Tree Cake is a tasty holiday treat that's easy to prepare. Simply add melted Reese's peanut butter chips and shortening to a store-bought cake mix and bake in a 13x9x2-inch pan. After the cake has cooled, cut as directed on the diagram. Ice the "tree" with ready-to-spread vanilla frosting. Use a leaf decorator tip and green decorator icing to make the tree branches. (Use brown decorator icing for the tree trunk and red decorator icing for the pot.) "Trim" the tree with colorful Hershey's holiday bits. The remaining pieces of cake can be decorated and used as packages. Ice with vanilla frosting and decorate with strands of several strands Twizzlers Pull'n'Peel and Hershey's holiday bits.

This year as you deck the halls,

don't forget to also decorate your holiday table with this festive edible centerpiece.

EASY CHRISTMAS TREE CAKE

- 1-2/3 cups (10-oz. pkg.) Reese's peanut butter chips
- 1 tablespoon shortening (do not use butter, margarine, oil or spread)
- 1 package (about 18 oz.) yellow cake mix
- 2 cans (16 oz. each) vanilla ready-to-spread frosting
- 2 tubes (4.25 oz. each) green decorator icing
- 1-2/3 cups (10-oz. pkg.) Hershey's holiday bits
- 1 tube (4.25 oz.) brown red decorator icing and green red decorator icing
- Twizzlers Pull'n'Peel cherry candy.

Heat-oven to 350F. Grease and flour 13x9x2-inch baking pan. Place peanut butter chips and shortening in small microwave-safe bowl. Microwave at HIGH 1 to 1-1/2 minutes or until smooth when

stirred. Prepare cake mix as directed on package with water, eggs and oil; blend in melted chip mixture. Pour batter into prepared pan.

Bake 30 to 35 minutes or until wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes; remove from pan to wire rack. Cool completely.

Cut cake as directed on diagram. Frost top and sides of Piece A with vanilla frosting; place on large serving plate or tray. Using leaf tip and green decorator icing, make tree branches about 1-1/2 inches long, starting at bottom of tree. To trim the tree, press holiday bits onto top of cake; lightly press into branches.

Frost top and sides of Piece B with brown decorator icing for trunk; attach to bottom of tree.

Frost top and sides of Piece C with red decorator icing for pot; attach to bottom of trunk.

Frost other pieces with vanilla frosting for packages. Decorate with strands of Pull'n'Peel and holiday bits, as desired. Makes about 12 to 15 servings.



For the Holidays

It is easy to get carried away in the grocery store during the holidays. Groceries always cost more anyway because of special holiday cooking, family gatherings and Christmas parties. The National Center for Financial Education has a few tips on how to economize at the grocery store and maybe not blow the grocery budget. And the NCFE says these tips are good all the year, not just at Christmas.

1. Always use a list and minimize the number of trips to the store.
2. Design the list based on store layout to save time and money.
3. Shop alone and avoid going to the store just before a meal.
4. Always check store ads and flyers for on-sale, money saving specials.
5. Take advantage of the always plentiful coupons and rebates.
6. Shop stores that double or triple coupons for greater savings.
7. Cold cuts cost less per pound at the deli-counter.
8. Save money on cheese: purchase blocks to slice or shred at home.
9. Purchase fresh, unpeeled, unwashed, unpackaged vegetables.
10. Purchase fruits and vegetables by the bag for the best value.
11. Purchase milk by the gallon, versus quarts, for best value.
12. Bulk buy whenever practical and save on cost per ounce or pound.
13. Avoid using expensive cuts of meats in stews or casseroles.
14. Compare prices on fresh/frozen turkeys for more edible meat per pound.
15. Pre-packaged foods cost 10 to 20 times more than plain or bulk.
16. Purchase generic or store brands when practical and money saving.
17. Avoid the more expensive single servings and so-called snack-packs.
18. Items placed at eye level on shelves are often more expensive.



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