



This gingerbread recipe produces cookies which are firm, chewy and keep well in an airtight container. They're a little dry and not too sweet, so they take lots of icing and decorations well. The dough handles well and the scraps can be re-rolled several times without toughening, so this is a good recipe for cooking with kids. You need a large stand mixer for this recipe; if mixing by hand, I'd recommend cutting the quantities in half unless you're strong as a horse!

Measurements are in American units (metric in parentheses).

1/3 cup (75 g) butter

1 cup packed (225 g) brown sugar

1 1/2 cups (355 ml) dark molasses* (treacle)

2/3 cup (160 ml) cold water

3 1/2 cups (440 g) all-purpose flour (plain flour)

3 1/2 cups (440 g) cake flour

2 tsp. (10 ml) baking soda (bicarb soda)

1 1/2 tsp (7.5 ml) salt

1 tsp (5 ml) allspice

1 tsp (5 ml) dried ground ginger

1 tsp (5 ml) ground cloves

1 tsp (5 ml) ground cinnamon

* For a lighter-coloured cookie which doesn't show through white icing, substitute half light molasses (golden syrup). You can also add an icing whitener to make the icing more opaque.

In a large mixer bowl, cream butter, brown sugar and molasses thoroughly. Slowly mix in water (mixture may curdle—that doesn't matter). Sift all the dry ingredients together so the spices are evenly distributed. Blend the dry ingredients into the butter mixture all at once, stopping several times to scrape down the sides of the bowl, until the dough comes together. If the dough seems too crumbly, you may have to add a small amount of water a teaspoon at a time until it forms a uniform mass.

Turn the dough out onto counter (benchtop) covered with non-stick baking paper which has been sprinkled with flour. Form the dough into a single even ball with your hands. This recipe makes a large quantity of dough; it's easier to work with if you divide it into two batches. Cover one half in plastic wrap (cling film) and put it in the fridge while you work on the first half.

On your floured baking paper, sprinkle the dough with a little flour and lightly rub it into the surface of the dough to prevent sticking. Then cover the dough with another piece of non-stick baking paper and roll it out to a thickness of 5mm (slightly less than 1/4 inch). Cut out shapes with a floured cookie cutter. Place on a baking sheet (oven tray) covered with non-stick baking paper; leave at least 1/2 inch (1 cm) between cookies.

Bake at 350°F (180°C) for 10-12 minutes, until cookies are firm. Do not over-bake. Cool on racks. Make sure cookies are completely cool before decorating.

Makes about 60 3 inch (75 mm) cookies.