

cookie decorating tips



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Making the cookies

There are several distinct stages to making decorated rollout cookies. This makes it easy to take the process one step at a time; and, depending on your schedule, those steps can be widely spaced. The cookie dough itself can be made in advance, and refrigerated (up to 1 week) or frozen (up to 3 months). Cookies can be rolled, cut, baked, and cooled, then stored in an airtight container to be decorated at another time. Finally, decorated cookies can be frozen till you're ready to serve, or give them away. Let's get started by making cookie dough.

We recommend [Holiday Butter Cookies](#), [Light Spice Holiday Cookies](#), [Gingerbread Cookies](#), or [Gluten-Free Rollout Cookies](#) for decorating. All of them need some time to chill before rolling and cutting. The easiest way to do this?



rolling it out easier.

Place the cookie dough in a large plastic bag, and flatten it slightly with a rolling pin. Place the dough on a flat surface in the refrigerator. This will help the dough chill evenly, and make



Take one piece of dough out of the refrigerator, and flour a clean work surface, and the dough. Roll it out as thin or thick as you like; for slightly less crisp cookies, roll it out more thickly.

We roll [Holiday Butter Cookies](#), 1/16" to 1/8" thick; [Light Spice Holiday Cookies](#), 1/8" to 1/4" thick; and [Gluten-Free Rollout Cookies](#) and [Gingerbread Cookies](#) (which we prefer a bit less crisp and more chewy), 1/4" thick.



pulling the plastic to eliminate wrinkles as necessary when rolling; this will keep dough from sticking without the need for additional flour.

Use flour under and on top of the dough to keep it from sticking to the table or rolling pin. Alternatively, place the dough on [parchment](#), and put a sheet of plastic wrap over it as you roll,



removed, the delicate cookies will hold their shape better because they don't have to be moved.

Rolling soft cookie dough on the back of a baking sheet, or on a cookie sheet without raised edges, makes the process easier, and the result better. When cut in place on the sheet, and the scraps



them while baking. Position your cutter in a way that maximizes the number of cookies you can get from each piece of dough, as shown.

Cut out shapes with a cookie cutter, spacing them as close to one another as possible. Cut cookies by pressing straight down with the cookie cutter. Cookies will need about half an inch of space between



For pretty sandwich cookies, cut decorative holes ("windows") in half the cookies, to allow the filling to show through. Here the tip of a pastry tube is being used to punch out holes.



After cutting cookies, carefully peel up the scrap dough between them. Refrigerate the dough, well-wrapped, to be rolled again later.

When cut in place on the sheet, and the scraps removed, delicate cookies will hold their shape better because they don't have to be moved.



parchment and all, to the baking sheet. After everything's safely on the baking sheet, use a thin-bladed metal turner to space the cookies properly before baking.

To make simple geometric shapes with no waste, use a rolling pizza wheel and a ruler to cut out squares or diamonds. If you've rolled on parchment, the cookies are easily transferred,

Transfer cookies to ungreased cookie sheets (or, if you've rolled right onto the pan, remove the dough scraps between the cookies). Bake the cookies just until they're slightly brown around the edges, or until they feel firm, about 8 to 12 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for several minutes, or until they're set. Transfer them to a rack to cool completely. Repeat with the remaining dough.

Icing & glaze recipes

While the cookies are cooling, prepare the icing. Choose [Royal Icing](#), for piping decorations; or [Simple Cookie Glaze](#), for smoothing the tops of cookies before decorating with food-safe paints or markers. For a more opaque glaze, especially good with gingerbread (whose dark color sometimes shows through a normal glaze), try [Hard Glaze for Cookies](#).

Decorating the cookies

Once the royal icing is made (or the cookies are glazed), it's time to collect the tools you'll use for decorating. If you plan to make more than one color of icing, divide the icing into separate small bowls, and tint each with a different food color; **gel paste colors** yield the most vibrant results. Cover the bowls to keep the icing from drying out.

If you plan to make more than one color of icing, take portions of the batch, place them in small bowls, and tint them with food coloring however you like. Cover the bowls until you need the icing, to keep it from drying out.

Now, collect your tools. Decide how you're going to decorate the cookies (pipe on decorations? Glaze, then paint?), then gather the appropriate tools.

Here are the tools we use most often:

A small paintbrush and a dish of water, for cleaning the brush between colors

Cotton swabs for cleaning up mistakes

Extra water to thin the icing

Food coloring, and small dishes to mix each color

Disposable pastry bags, a coupler, and piping tips

Rolling pin

Pair of scissors

Ruler

Small nylon spatulas and thin-blade metal turners, for moving cookies around

Rolling pizza wheel

Parchment paper

Cookie cutters

Assorted colored sugars

Shallow dishes for dipping and dredging

Food-safe pens

Garlic press



A tall measuring cup or heavy-bottomed drinking glass is a big help when filling a pastry bag with royal icing. Place the bag inside the cup, folding the top back over the rim of the cup. Scoop icing into the bag with

the help of a spatula; don't fill the bag more than three-fourths full. Take the bag out of the cup, and twist the top (open end) to hold the icing in. A twist tie or rubber band is helpful to keep the top of the bag closed, so icing doesn't back up onto your hand.



You can use the pastry bag without a tip by snipping a very small hole at the end with a pair of scissors. If you're filling the bag with very stiff icing, do this before putting the icing in the bag. The

tiny hole will allow air to escape ahead of the icing, making the bag easier to fill.



A plastic coupler can be placed in the pastry bag first. This allows you to change tip shapes without filling another bag. Different tips will give you different effects.



To make a striped line, use a paintbrush to paint lines of food coloring up the inside wall of the pastry bag before filling it. The colors will mix as they come through the tube.

Outlining and filling

One of the best ways to create a dramatic effect without much effort or fuss is to outline the edges of the cookie, then fill in the center with a contrasting icing color. When this technique is used to accent a filled cookie, the effect can be striking, as shown here.



Pipe a thin bead of icing around the edge of the tree. Let it dry until stiff.



To fill in the outlined area, thin some tinted icing with water. Use a paintbrush to cover the cookie's surface inside the outline.



To fill cookies with jam, warm the jam in the microwave, stirring until no lumps remain. Spread the jam on the bottom cookie, covering its entire surface.



Press the top cookie onto the filling to finish your filled cookie.



A simple decoration for round cookies: Dip the edge in a shallow dish of icing, coating it $\frac{1}{4}$ " in towards the center, all around the outside. This works best with cookies that are at least $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick.



To complete the decoration, roll the iced cookie edge, while the icing is still sticky, in colored sugar, nonpareils, or sprinkles.

Working with several Colors simultaneously

Several colors of icing, used all at once, can create a stunning look. Contrasting colors can be mixed for a marbled effect; drawn through each other with a toothpick or cake tester, or mixed with a paintbrush on top of the cookie.



Frost the cookie with one color icing, then pipe a second color on top to create a polka dot effect, or spots.



Dragées or sugar decorations are placed onto the icing while it's still soft.



After piping white stripes over the base color (while the base is still soft), a toothpick, straw, or cake tester can be used to pull one color through the other. Place the toothpick at the edge of the

cookie, and draw it through the two colors in a straight line.



To create a marbled effect, first mix two contrasting colors in a shallow dish, leaving identifiable streaks.



Dip the top of the cookie into the marbled icing on the plate, and use a knife or small spatula to spread it evenly over the surface.



Colors can be combined right on the cookie's surface. After an area is covered with icing, it can be tinted while still soft with food coloring and a paintbrush.

Icing in two stages

Achieve a professional look for your cookies by first coating them with a base color of glaze, allowing it to completely harden. After the base is dry, a contrasting color is piped on top. This top color can be accented with colored sugar, sprinkles, or other sugar decorations, if you wish. Cookies that have a dry base coat of color are also perfect candidates for decorating with food-safe markers.



Outline an iced heart cookie with a lighter color, and decorate with an inscription. To show off these features, sprinkle colored sugar over the accent frosting while it's still soft.

Excess sugar can be shaken or brushed off after the top color has dried.



Accentuate both the look and flavor of cookies with warm chocolate ganache. A locking sandwich bag with one corner snipped off is a handy way to drizzle on liquid chocolate.



This bunny has two different accent colors, which show off his ears and whiskers. A food-safe marking pen has been used to draw his eyes and mouth. Sugar decorations are then placed in the soft

frosting on his paws.

Working with fondant.

Fondant is stiff yet pliable frosting (similar in texture to modeling clay) that can be tinted, rolled, cut out, and draped over cookies or cakes, where it dries to a smooth, hard surface. Fondant can also be molded, or shaped into distinct textures with embossing tools. Fondant can serve as decoration on its own, or be used as a base for further decoration.



Tint the fondant with food coloring, then knead it with your hands until a marbled effect is created. Fondant is best rolled with a plastic rolling pin, to avoid sticking. To "ice" a cookie with fondant, roll the icing

to wafer thinness, then cut it to shape with the same cutter you used to cut your cookie.



Place the fondant on top of the baked cookie, pressing it down gently to make it stick.



Pipe icing on top of the fondant; sprinkle sugar on top of the soft piped icing to accent.



By squeezing tinted fondant through a garlic press, strands of frosting are created that make great hair for this little girl.



A cookie cutter is used to help make a dress for the little girl from rolled fondant. Use a food marker to draw final details, such as the face, the buttons on the dress, and the ruffle on the hem.