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Release Date: December 4, 2017

## **Bake Perfect Christmas Cookies**

Everybody enjoys baking and decorating cookies for the Christmas season. It is a family tradition for many homes, one that will hopefully be passed down to future generations. These traditions become memories that will last a lifetime.

There are times when making and decorating cookies that things do not go as expected, and the cookies just don't turn out like they should. An example: the cookie dough sticks to the rolling pin.

When that happens, lightly dust the surface and rolling pin to prevent sticking. You may need to occasionally repeat dusting with flour. You can also use a pastry cloth and stockinet-covered rolling pin to make rolling the dough easier, and to help prevent dough from sticking. Rub flour evenly onto rolling pin and pastry cloth for easy handling. If dough is too soft, refrigerate for about one hour.

You have rolled out the dough, cut the perfect cookie shape and placed on the cookie sheet only to have the dough spread and become flat while baking. If this happens, refrigerate the dough until well chilled (1 to 2 hours). If the dough is too soft, stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons of flour.

It's not necessary to spray the cookie sheet. This can cause the cookies to spread too much and brown too quickly around the edges.

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Start with quality ingredients for a quality cookie. Never use a low-fat spread with 60 percent or less fat in place of butter or margarine in baking recipes. Low-fat spreads have higher moisture content and will make cookie dough very soft.

Evenly browned cookies should be baked using a baking stone, or a shiny, aluminum cookie sheet at least two inches narrower and shorter than the oven. The sheet may be open on one, two or three sides.

Watch dark colored cookie sheets. Cookies may brown quicker. Place one cookie sheet in the oven at a time in the middle of the center rack of the oven. If cookies are baked on the bottom rack of the oven, they may burn or not bake evenly.

Make sure there is about 2 inches of space around the cookie sheet to allow for good air circulation.

Once cookies are made, freeze for later use for up to 2 months. Arrange cookies in a container lined with plastic food wrap or aluminum foil. For best results, wrap cookies individually in plastic wrap. Separate with layers of aluminum foil or plastic food wrap.

Store in an airtight container, label and date each container. Thaw cookies, by letting them stand loosely covered on a serving plate for about 20 minutes before frosting or serving.

For answers to additional baking questions or any other topic related to Family and Consumer Science, contact Holly Jay at MSU Extension Office, Big Horn County, 406-665-9770 or stop by 317 N. Custer Ave. in Hardin. Article Adapted with permission from Carla Hadley University of Arkansas Extension.

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