

Salt and Serenity

Autumn Gingerbread Leaves

Makes 14 5-inch cookies

The gingerbread recipe comes from Cook's Illustrated Magazine.

Cookies:

3 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
¾ cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
¾ teaspoon baking soda
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
2 teaspoons ground ginger
½ teaspoon ground cloves (totally optional – I leave it out as I hate cloves)
½ teaspoon salt
12 tablespoons (1 ½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still cool, cut into 12 pieces
¾ cup fancy (not cooking) molasses
2 tablespoons milk

Royal Icing

3 Tablespoons *Wilton's Meringue Powder*
4 cups icing sugar
pinch of kosher salt
5 Tablespoons water

Food Colouring (available at Michael's craft store)

Americolor Soft Gel in the following colours:

Orange
Red Red
Warm Brown
Chocolate Brown
Black
Lemon Yellow

1. In a food processor, process the flour, brown sugar, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, cloves and salt until combined, about 10 seconds. Scatter the butter pieces over the flour mixture and process until the mixture is sandy and resembles very fine meal, about 15 seconds.
2. With the machine running, gradually add the molasses and milk. Process until the dough is evenly moistened and forms a soft mass, about 10 seconds.
3. Scrape dough out onto a work surface and divide it half. Working with one piece at a time, roll the dough, ¼ inch thick, between 2 sheets of parchment paper. Leaving the dough sandwiched between the parchment layers, stack on a baking sheet and freeze until firm, 15-20 minutes.
4. Adjust the oven racks to the upper and lower middle positions and heat the oven to 350 degrees F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.
5. Remove 1 dough sheet from the freezer; place on work surface. Peel off top parchment sheet and gently lay it back in place. Flip the dough over; peel off and discard second parchment layer.

6. Cut the dough using cookie cutters of your choice. Transfer shapes to prepared baking sheets, using a wide metal spatula, spacing them $\frac{3}{4}$ inches apart. Chill cut leaves in freezer for about 10 minutes to firm them up. Set scraps aside.
7. Bake the chilled cookies for 8 – 11 minutes, until they are set in the centers and the dough barely retains an imprint when touched very gently with a fingertip. The baking sheets should be rotated from front to back and switching positions top to bottom, halfway through the baking time. Do not overbake. Cool cookies on the sheets for 2 minutes, then remove the cookies with a wide metal spatula to a wire rack to cool completely.
8. Gather the scraps; repeat rolling, cutting and baking.
9. While the cookies are cooling, prepare the royal icing. In the bowl of a mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, place meringue powder, icing sugar, salt and water. Mix on low speed for one minute until ingredients are combined. Turn mixer up to medium speed and whisk for 8-10 minutes. Royal icing will keep for a week in an airtight container at room temperature for a week. Whisk well before using.
10. Divide icing into 4, placing each quarter in a medium sized mixing bowl.
11. Make brown icing: Add 4 drops of warm brown and 4 drops of chocolate brown to one bowl of white icing and mix well. Transfer to airtight container until ready to use.
12. Make red icing: Add 8 drops of red red and 1 drop of black icing to one bowl of white icing and mix well. Transfer to airtight container until ready to use.
13. Make harvest orange/gold icing: Add 8 drops of orange, 2 drops of red red and 1 drop of chocolate brown to one bowl of white icing and mix well. Transfer to airtight container until ready to use.
14. Make yellow icing: Add 10 drops lemon yellow, 3 drops orange and 1 drop red red to one bowl of white icing and mix well. Transfer to airtight container until ready to use.
15. Thin each colour with a little water so that it is the proper consistency for piping. You are looking for a “5 second consistency”. What this means is that when ribbons of icing drop off a spoon, they get absorbed back into the icing within 5 seconds.
16. Set up 4 tall drinking glasses. Crumple up a dampened paper towel in the bottom of each glass. Place a disposable plastic piping bag in each glass and fold the top of the open bag over the glass.
17. Fill each bag halfway with a different colour. Twist bag closed and secure with a twist tie. Cut a tiny hole in the bottom of each bag with very sharp scissors.
18. You are now ready to decorate. Only do one cookie at a time as the icing needs to be wet in order to marleize the leaf veins. Watch the video on my Autumn Gingerbread Leaves blog post.
19. Let cookies dry overnight at room temperature. Store in an airtight container, with sheets of waxed paper between the layers, for up to 2 weeks.

