

Chewy Sugar Cookies

From America's Test Kitchen Season 11:

Makes 2 dozen cookies

The final dough will be slightly softer than most cookie dough. For the best results, handle the dough as briefly and gently as possible when shaping the cookies. Overworking the dough will result in flatter cookies.

Ingredients

2 1/4 cups (11 1/4 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon table salt
1 1/2 cups (10 1/2 ounces) sugar, plus 1/3 cup for rolling
2 ounces cream cheese, cut into 8 pieces
6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) unsalted butter, melted and still warm
1/3 cup vegetable oil
1 large egg
1 tablespoon milk
2 teaspoons vanilla extract



Instructions

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 large rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper. Whisk flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt together in medium bowl. Set aside.
2. Place 1 1/2 cups sugar and cream cheese in large bowl. Place remaining 1/3 cup sugar in shallow baking dish or pie plate and set aside. Pour warm butter over sugar and cream cheese and whisk to combine (some small lumps of cream cheese will remain but will smooth out later). Whisk in oil until incorporated. Add egg, milk, and vanilla; continue to whisk until smooth. Add flour mixture and mix with rubber spatula until soft homogeneous dough forms.
3. Divide dough into 24 equal pieces, about 2 tablespoons each (or use #40 portion scoop). Using hands, roll dough into balls. Working in batches, roll balls in reserved sugar to coat and evenly space on prepared baking sheet, 12 dough balls per sheet. Using bottom of drinking glass, flatten dough balls until 2 inches in diameter. Sprinkle tops evenly with 4 teaspoons of sugar remaining in shallow dish (2 teaspoons per tray), discarding any remaining sugar.
4. Bake, 1 tray at a time, until edges are set and just beginning to brown, 11 to 13 minutes, rotating tray after 7 minutes. Cool cookies on baking sheets 5 minutes. Using wide metal spatula, transfer cookies to wire rack and cool to room temperature.

Technique

- **Dynamic Duo: Baking Powder + Baking Soda**

Many cookie recipes, including our Chewy Sugar Cookies, contain both baking soda and baking powder. Since each is a leavening agent, why do you need both? The answer is that the two work in tandem to

create cookies that not only rise—but spread—to the right degree. Plus in our recipe, baking soda has one more purely aesthetic effect: It creates cookies with an appealingly crackly top.

Baking powder is responsible for lift, since it is engineered to produce most of its gas after the cookies go into the oven, where the dough sets before these bubbles can burst.

But too much lift can mean cookies that turn out humped. Here's where baking soda comes in: As long as there's an acidic ingredient in the dough for it to react with, a small amount of baking soda can even things out. Baking soda raises the pH of dough (baking powder does too, but not as high), weakening gluten. Weaker gluten means less structure and cookies that spread. Goodbye, humped shapes.

As for crackly tops, baking soda reacts immediately in the wet dough to produce large bubbles of carbon dioxide that can't all be contained by the weakened dough. Before the cookies can set in the oven, the bubbles rise to the top and burst, leaving fissures in their wake.

The bottom line: For a baker who likes her cookies just so, the use of both baking powder and baking soda can be a potent combo.



POWDER, NO SODA: With only baking powder in the mix, our cookies bake up humped with less crackly tops.



POWDER + SODA: Both leaveners in the dough lead to cookies that are perfectly mounded and nicely crackly.

Secret Weapons for Taste and Texture

Sugar cookies can be cloyingly sweet, and even those billing themselves as chewy rarely are. These two ingredients helped us create the best flavor and chewy texture.



CREAM CHEESE: Cream cheese is an ingredient not often included in sugar cookies. But we found it helps cut their one-note sweetness and round out flavors.



OIL: All-butter sugar cookies may have rich taste, but they never boast real chew. Swapping some of the butter, which is mainly a saturated fat, for unsaturated vegetable oil boosts chewiness considerably. Why? The two types of fat create a sturdier structure that requires more force to bite through.

Why this recipe works:

Traditional recipes for sugar cookies require obsessive attention to detail. The butter must be at precisely the right temperature and it must be creamed to the proper degree of airiness. Slight variations in measures can result in cookies that spread or cookies that become brittle and hard upon cooling. We didn't want a cookie that depended on such a finicky process, we wanted an approachable recipe for great sugar cookies that anyone could make anytime. We melted the butter so our sugar cookie dough could easily be mixed together with a spoon—no more fussy creaming. Replacing a portion of the melted butter with vegetable oil ensured a chewy cookie without affecting flavor. And incorporating an unusual addition, cream cheese, into the cookie dough kept our cookies tender, while the slight tang of the cream cheese made for a rich, not-too-sweet cookie.