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### Making Christmas Cookies as a Family

It seems almost everyone's Christmas trees are up, houses are lit, and everyone's Christmas shopping has begun! This is one of my favorite times of the year and I owe a lot of it to the memories my family has made over the years. One of my favorite memories is baking Christmas cookies! If your family doesn't bake cookies or treats as a family, I would recommend trying it out this year because the memories made, lessons learned, and calories eaten, make up for the hassle!

Everybody can decorate their cookies differently, some buy cookie dough, some buy frosting, some make royal icing, but my favorite way to make Christmas cookies is by making homemade sugar cookies with the "Wilton's" Buttercream recipe on top! While my family makes cookies we listen to Christmas music, a favorite of mine being Christmas Cookies by George Strait. My mom, sisters, and I spend a few hours baking the cookies and mixing the frosting, and sometimes my dad even gets involved in the decorating process. We do different colors of frosting and buy fun sprinkles to put on top. The conversations while decorating over the years have shifted from talking about baby dolls to talking about the next basketball game, to now talking about all of our jobs, but I wouldn't trade this conversation for the world.

The memories made over the years are priceless, but that isn't the only takeaway from decorating Christmas Cookies as a family! There is learning involved as well. If you have children that are young, they can learn how to measure and mix while making the cookie dough and frosting. Decorating the cookies can also teach them fine motor skills. As your children grow, they may get better at decorating and you as a family can try new things like a different kind of frosting or to use a frosting bag instead of a knife to spread the frosting. There are soft skills that can be learned from baking Christmas Cookies together such as patience and teamwork. Baking cookies can get lengthy, and it takes patience to wait for them to cook and cool, as well as patience to work with one another. Teamwork makes the dream work, and that cannot be truer when baking cookies, it is important to work together as a family because everyone will feel less stressed, and it will be overall more fun!

We can all look at Christmas traditions and see them as a hassle, and sometimes they feel that way. But it is important to take time to make memories as a family because looking back, we will never remember the exact Christmas we got the Xbox, Barbie Doll, or Ipad, but we will remember the time spent with one another. Please see my favorite sugar cookie and frosting recipe below to use with your family this Holiday Season. Merry Christmas!

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### **Sugar Cookies**

Ingredients

2 cups white sugar

1 ½ cups butter, softened

4 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon almond extract-don't skip this one!

5 cups all purpose flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

Directions:

1. Beat sugar and softened butter together in a large bowl with an electric mixer until smooth.
2. Beat in eggs, vanilla, and almond. Stir in flour, baking powder, and salt. Cover, and chill dough for at least 1 hour (or overnight).
3. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F
4. Lightly dust a work surface with flour. Roll out dough to  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thickness.
5. Cut into shapes with any cookie cutter. Place cookies 1 inch apart on an ungreased baking sheet
6. Bake in the oven until cookies are lightly browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Carefully transfer cookies to a wire reach and cool completely before decorating.

This recipe is from Allrecipes.com

### **Wilton's Buttercream Frosting**

Ingredients:

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup solid vegetable shortening

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup unsalted butter

4 cups sifted powdered sugar

2 tablespoons milk

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Pinch of salt

Directions:

1. Using an electric mixer fitted with beaters or a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the butter and shortening on a medium speed until light and fluffy. Beat in the vanilla extract and scrape down the bowl occasionally.
2. Gradually add the powdered sugar, one cup at a time. Start by mixing each cup on a low speed then transition to beating well on medium speed. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl after each cup of sugar is added. When all the sugar has been mixed in, the frosting will appear dry and stiff.
3. Gradually add small amounts of cream or milk or water at a time until the desired consistency is reached. Continue to beat at a medium speed until light and fluffy. Scrape down the bowl once more and beat again to make sure all the ingredients are incorporated.