

DUTCH SPECULAAS

Makes about 48 cookies

In the Netherlands, these delightful spiced Christmas cookies are shaped with wooden molds intricately carved with such holiday symbols as a Christmas tree, Saint Nicholas, or even a flower. Here, I have simplified the recipe, eliminating the molds but not the delicious flavor.

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1½ teaspoons ground ginger
½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
½ teaspoon ground cardamom
1 teaspoon baking soda
1½ teaspoons kosher salt
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons (5 ounces) unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ cup firmly packed golden brown sugar
3 tablespoons golden syrup (see page 154) or light corn syrup
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Sift the flour, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cloves, cardamom, and baking soda into a bowl, then whisk in the salt. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the butter and brown sugar and beat on medium speed for 3 minutes, until light and creamy. Add the golden syrup, egg, and vanilla and beat until blended. On low speed, add the flour mixture and beat just until incorporated.

Lay a large sheet of plastic wrap on a work surface and scrape the dough onto it. Shape the dough into a rough log, then, using the palm of your hand, flatten the log slightly until it is about 15 inches long and 2½ inches in diameter. Wrap the log in the plastic wrap, and, using your fingers, smooth the long sides to make them a little more rounded, turning the log over a few times as you work. The dough will be a little soft at this stage. Refrigerate the log overnight to firm it up and allow the spices to infuse the dough, turning it a few times to prevent it from developing a flat side.

Position two oven racks, evenly spaced, in the oven and preheat the oven to 375°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Using a sharp knife, cut the log into ¼-inch-thick slices. Arrange half of the slices on each prepared baking sheet, spacing them evenly. Drag the tines of a fork lengthwise and at a slight angle on top of each slice to create lines. If you like, change the angle and drag the tines across the slice again to create criss-crossed lines.

Bake the cookies for 14 to 16 minutes, until firm to the touch and dark golden brown, switching the baking sheets between the racks about halfway through the baking time. Transfer the baking sheets to wire racks and let cool for 5 minutes, then carefully transfer the cookies to the racks and let cool completely before serving.