



Friendly Ghosts

Makes about 2 dozen
(1 3/4 x 2 1/4- to 2 1/2-inch-tall) "ghosts"

Enshrouded in meringue, these chewy date and nut treats are oh-so-sweet. Note: For kids, substitute orange juice for the liqueur in the filling, or omit the filling as just described.

Cookie Key:

Complexity:

Active Time:

1



Prep Talk: Because meringue quickly attracts moisture, package these cookies in airtight containers as soon as they've cooled. Store at room temperature up to 1 week. Even if properly stored, the cookies may still get sticky due to their high fruit content. In this case, re-dry in a 225 degree F oven, if desired.

Date-Nut Filling

1 cup dried pitted dates, stems removed and finely chopped

1 1/2 teaspoons finely grated orange zest

3 tablespoons freshly squeezed orange juice

2 tablespoons candied orange peel, finely chopped

1 1/2 tablespoons Grand Marnier or other premium orange liqueur
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons pecan halves, toasted and finely chopped
3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
3/4 teaspoon ground cloves

Meringue Cloak

4 large egg whites, room temperature

1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar

1 cup sifted superfine sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch

About 1/2 tablespoon miniature chocolate chips (or about 4 dozen chips, 2 per cookie, for the "eyes")

1. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 225 degrees F. Line two cookie sheets with parchment paper. (If you have two ovens, preheat both. The meringue needs to be baked immediately or it softens and deflates. The cookies will also dry more evenly with one cookie sheet per oven. If you don't have two ovens, you'll need to make a second batch of meringue to coat the cookies on the second cookie sheet. But do so only after the first sheet is out of the oven.)
2. **Mix the Date-Nut Filling.** Combine the dates, orange zest, juice, peel, and liqueur in a medium (3-quart) nonreactive (stainless steel or coated) saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring regularly, until the dates have softened and all of the liquid has been absorbed, about 10 minutes. Cook the mixture another 3 to 5 minutes to dry it further. Stir regularly to prevent scorching. Remove from the heat and stir in the chopped pecans and spices. Cool the mixture completely before shaping.
3. Portion the filling into small mounds using a level 1- to 1 1/4-inch (#100) scoop or 1 level teaspoon per mound. Roll the mounds between your palms to form uniform 3/4-inch balls and arrange them evenly around the perimeter of each cookie sheet. (It will be easier to add the chocolate chip "eyes" to the cookies in Step 6 if the cookies are arranged this way.)

4. **Mix the Meringue Cloak.** Place the egg whites and cream of tartar in the clean bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a whip attachment. (*Note:* Be sure the whites are at room temperature, as cold meringue is more likely to crack in the heat of the oven. The bowl, whip attachment, and all mixing utensils should also be completely free of fat, or the egg whites will not stiffen.) Beat on low speed until the whites are frothy. Turn the mixer to medium speed and gradually add the superfine sugar, no more than 1 tablespoon at a time. Quickly scrape down the sides of the bowl and then turn the mixer to high speed. Continue beating until the whites are very stiff and glossy and the sugar has completely dissolved, about 10 minutes. Sprinkle the cornstarch evenly over the top and beat until incorporated, about 30 seconds longer.

5. Fit a pastry bag with a large (3/4-inch) 8- to 10-pronged star tip and fill with the meringue. Work on one cookie at a time, but work quickly before the meringue deflates. Hold the bag perpendicular to the date ball with the pastry tip directly touching the top, and press so that the meringue conceals as much of the ball as possible. Slowly lift the pastry bag straight up, while still applying pressure, to make the "ghost" stand 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 inches tall; then pull up quickly, without applying pressure, to create a peak on top. Repeat with the remaining cookies.
6. For the ghost's "eyes," carefully place two mini chocolate chips on the side of each cookie, about one-third of the way from the cookie top. (Insert the tips of the chocolate chips into the meringue so that the round bottoms are left exposed.) Gently press the chips into the meringue with the tip of a paring knife.
7. Bake until bone-dry to the touch but only minimally discolored, about 1 1/2 to 2 hours. (*Note:* Drying time can vary significantly with ambient humidity. Bake toward the longer end of the spectrum on rainy days.) Immediately transfer to a wire rack and cool completely before storing.



Great Pumpkin Cookies

Makes 2 ½ to 3 dozen (2-inch) “pumpkins”

Embellished with orange glaze, cinnamon stick “stems,” and green sugar “vines,” these pumpkins appear to be freshly plucked from the patch. Note: For smoother pumpkins for decorating, you may decrease or omit the raisins and walnuts. Without these add-ins, the recipe yields closer to 2 ½ dozen cookies.

Cookie Key:

Complexity: Active Time:

1



Prep Talk: Store in airtight containers at room temperature up to 5 days. Because of their high pumpkin content, these soft cookies will get even softer within a few days, especially under humid conditions. Eat freshly baked if you want to enjoy a crunchy exterior.

2 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons cornstarch
1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon baking powder
2 ½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground cloves
1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
¾ teaspoon ground ginger
¾ teaspoon salt
1 cup granulated sugar
¾ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
½ cup (1 stick) plus 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
1 large egg
1 ¼ cups canned pure pumpkin purée (with no added sugar or spices)
1 ½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1 ½ cups walnut halves, lightly toasted, cooled, and coarsely chopped (optional)
1 ¼ cups raisins (optional)

Icing and Glaze (optional)

1 recipe Royal Icing (p. TK)
½ to 1 teaspoon water (to thin the icing)
About 60 drops orange soft gel food coloring (p. TK)
½ teaspoon pure orange extract

About 3 drops red soft gel food coloring
About 3 drops brown soft gel food coloring
About 4 tablespoons strained freshly squeezed orange juice
Powdered sugar (to thicken the glaze, as needed)

Decoration (optional)

About 12 cinnamon sticks, cut into 2 ½ to 3 dozen small (¾- to 1-inch) pieces (1 per cookie)
2 ½ to 3 dozen (¾- to 1-inch) fondant leaves (1 per cookie, see “Fun with Fondant,” p. TK)
2 ½ to 3 dozen (1 ½- to 2-inch) fondant vines (1 per cookie, see “Fun with Fondant,” p. TK)

- Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Line two or more cookie sheets with parchment paper.
- Combine the flour, cornstarch, baking soda, baking powder, spices, and salt in a bowl. Set aside for use in Step 4.
- Place the sugars and butter in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment and beat on medium-low speed until well combined. Add the egg and beat on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 1 to 2 minutes. Turn the mixer to low speed and beat in the pumpkin purée and vanilla extract. Scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed to ensure even mixing. *Note:* The batter will separate slightly after the addition of the pumpkin, but this is completely expected.
- Stir in the flour mixture, followed by the walnuts and raisins, if desired.
- Portion the dough into mounds using a level 1 ¾-inch (#40) scoop or 1 heaping tablespoon per mound. Place the mounds about 2 inches apart on the prepared cookie sheets. (A scoop will make rounder pumpkins than a tablespoon.)
- Bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until dry and firm on the outside and lightly browned on the bottom. Immediately transfer to wire racks and cool completely before storing or glazing.
- Mix the Icing and Glaze (optional).** Prepare 1 recipe Royal Icing. Portion out ½ cup. Add enough water (½ to 1 teaspoon) to bring this portion to outlining consistency (p. TK). Stir in a drop of orange food coloring to make a pale shade. Cover the surface of the icing flush with plastic wrap and set aside for use in Step 11. To the remaining icing, add the orange extract and the rest of the orange food coloring, and mix until well combined. To enrich the bright orange to a burnished shade, add the red and brown food coloring, if desired. Gradually add enough orange juice to make a thick glaze. (The glaze should thinly coat a “test” cookie, but you should not be able to see through it. Adjust the glaze consistency as needed by adding more juice to thin it or powdered sugar to thicken it.)
- Set a wire rack over a sheet of parchment paper. (The paper will catch the glaze drippings in Step 9 and make for easier cleanup later.)
- Work with one cookie at a time. Hold the cookie by the bottom and completely immerse its top in the dark orange glaze. Turn the cookie right side up, and gently shake it to remove excess glaze and to smooth the top. Place on the rack, and insert a small piece of cinnamon stick into the top-center of the cookie to make the pumpkin “stem.” Repeat with the remaining cookies. (Remember: Tell guests to remove the cinnamon sticks before eating.)
- Before the glaze dries, slide a paring knife under each cookie to sever any drippings that may be clinging to the rack. (The glaze will otherwise dry onto the rack, making it more difficult to remove the cookies later.)
- Let the cookies dry until the glaze loses its sheen. Fill a parchment paper cone with the reserved pale orange icing and cut a small (¼-inch or less) hole in the tip. Add contours to the pumpkins by piping 8 to 9 thin lines radiating out from the cinnamon stick “stem” on each cookie. For the finishing touch, use the icing to glue a fondant leaf and vine around each stem.
- Let the icing dry completely before storing. *Note:* There will be leftover Royal Icing. Cover and store as directed (p. TK) for another use.