



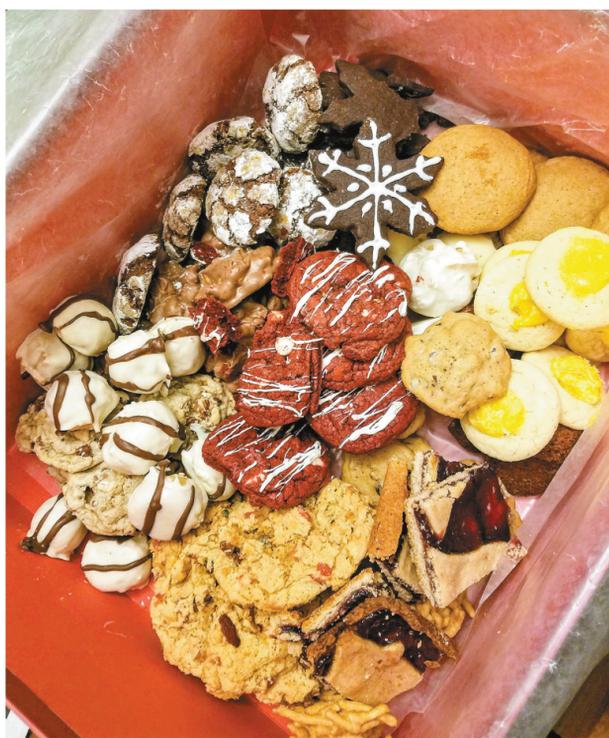
“Christmas cookies and happy hearts, this is how the holiday starts.”

Spreading joy with cookies

Around this time last year I participated in a cookie exchange for the first time in many years and enjoyed it immensely ... much more so than I expected. So when it came time to sign up for the 2021 Christmas Cookie exchange, I was all in. In fact, I'd already selected my cookie ... but more about that later.

We knew we'd be baking cookies in increments by the dozen but wouldn't know for sure how many dozen we'd be baking until we had the final tally of how many people would be participating.

Our instructions were to make fresh, homemade Christmas cookies, accompanied by the recipe. We were to deliver the cookies to the point person on a designated day and on the following day we'd receive a half-dozen cookies of each variety along with a half-dozen of our own, plus the recipes. We were instructed there was no need for special packaging, just seal for freshness and they would be divided and put into containers for delivery. We ended up with 13 participants which meant we'd each be making six and a half



dozen, or 78, cookies.

While the cookies I baked last year were delicious, they weren't

much to look at. Remembering the beautiful variety we received last year and the effort displayed by

some of the bakers, I knew I wanted to step up my game this year and bake something that not only was tasty, but also pretty.

I happened to be shopping in CVS one day about two months prior to the cookie deadline when something on the magazine rack caught my eye – an issue titled Better Homes & Gardens' Christmas Cookies. I picked it up, thumbed through it a little and put it in my basket.

Upon further review once I got home, this book proved well worth the \$12.99 price tag. Not only was it divided into 16 different types of cookies with multiple recipes per type, it also included a number of tips and tricks, serving and packaging suggestions and even a basic cookie-baking primer in the back. It was absolutely perfect for me considering I only bake cookies once a year. And check out the 16 different cookie types for inspiration: “Spritz Wreaths,” “No Oven Needed,” “Spiral Effect,” “Rebuilt as Bars,” “Mug Buddies,” “Joy in a Jar,” “Cookies to Savor,” “The Total Package,” “Cross-Country Cookies,” “Nordic Simplicity,” “Going to Extremes,” “Dough Many Ways,” “Flavors of Mexico,” “Just Add Java,” “Four-Square Decorating” and “Beyond Peanut Butter.”

I knew I wanted to make a cookie

that would taste good and be pretty too and if there was something just a little bit different about it, that would be an added benefit. I'm realistic about my cookie-decorating skill level so I knew it would have to be something I could handle. I ended up selecting one from the “Flavors of Mexico” section – Chocolate-Ancho Crinkles. The idea of ancho chile powder in a cookie just intrigued me.

The cookies we'd baked were due by 5 p.m. on a Tuesday and we would receive our haul on Thursday. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't just a little eager for Thursday to arrive. Oh my! The festive red box was 14½” by 11½” and 6” deep. I opened the lid to see a huge array of cookies that were just as beautiful as last year's, yet a completely different assortment.

This year's haul included the following: Yuletide Raspberry Almond Linzer Bars, Ugly Betty Cookie Balls, Hay Stacks, Holiday Truffles, Chocolate Chip and Pecan Cookies, Red Velvet White Chip Cookies, Gloria's Applebutter Cupcakes, Good Almond Fruitcake Cookies, Brownie Roll-Out Cookies, Easy Sugar Cookies with Lemon Curd, Neiman Marcus \$250 Cookies, Spice Coffee Cookies, Crock Pot Candy and Chocolate-Ancho Crinkles. ■

Chocolate-Ancho Crinkles

From Better Homes & Gardens Christmas Cookies 2021

- 4 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped
- ⅓ cup avocado oil or canola oil
- 3 eggs, lightly beaten
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 teaspoon ancho chile powder
- ¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon

- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 ¾ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup buckwheat flour or whole wheat flour
- ⅔ cup powdered sugar

• In a small saucepan, heat and stir chocolate and oil over low until melted and smooth. Cool 15 minutes.

• In a large bowl combine eggs, granulated sugar, baking powder, vanilla, ¾ teaspoon of the ancho chile powder, ½ teaspoon of the cinnamon, and the salt. Stir in chocolate mixture. Gradually stir in flours until well combined. Cover

and chill 2 hours or until dough is easy to handle

• Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Lightly grease cookie sheets. In a small bowl combine powdered sugar and the remaining ¼ teaspoon each ancho chile powder and cinnamon.

• Shape dough into 1 ¼-inch balls. Roll balls in powdered sugar mixture to coat well. Place balls 2 inches apart on prepared cookie sheets. Bake 9 to 11 minutes or just until edges are firm and cracks appear slightly moist. Remove; cool on wire racks.

Brownie Roll-Out Cookies

From foodal.com

Baked by Amy Holzworth

- 2 ½ cups all purpose flour, plus extra for rolling
- ⅔ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
- 1 ½ cups granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

• In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa powder and baking soda. Set aside.

• In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter, sugar and salt until light and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time, mixing until each one is fully incorporated. Add the vanilla. Gradually add the dry ingredients to the creamed mixture. Mix until a dough forms, but don't overmix.

• Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface. Press gently into a flat disc shape. Cover the disc in plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes.

• When ready to roll and cut, preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Take out the chilled dough from the refrigerator.

• Dust a clean countertop or table with flour. Remove the dough from the plastic wrap and place on the prepared surface. Roll it from ⅛-inch thickness to ¼-inch thickness. Cut into your desired shapes. Transfer the cookies to sheet pans lined with parchment paper or a silicone mat, being sure to leave about ½ inch between each cookie.

• Bake for 6-8 minutes, depending on the thickness. The edges will be slightly firm and the center slightly soft and puffed. Remove from the oven. Let the cookies cool for about 5 minutes on the baking sheet before carefully transferring to a cooling rack to cool completely. Decorate and serve.

Spiced Coffee Cookies

Baked by Donna Hammer

- 1 cup soft butter-flavored shortening
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup cold coffee
- 3 ½ cups flour

- 1 teaspoon baking soda
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 1 teaspoon nutmeg
 - 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 - ½ teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

• Mix together shortening, sugar and eggs until creamy. Then add cold coffee. Stir in dry ingredients and stir until creamy. Chill for one hour. Roll into balls. Place about two inches apart on a parchment paper-lined cookie sheet. Smush slightly to make like a button. Bake 8-10 minutes. Let cool.

A little about wine

In our last column (December 5th) I wrote a little about the history of wine ... clearly wine has come a long way since 8000 BC. Today we cover what is wine? What are the types of wine? A little about what foods go with Chardonnay, the most popular white wine in the world.

It's no surprise that the ancients stumbled onto wine—it's easy to make. Put some yeast and grape juice in a jug, add a stopper with a hole for the carbon dioxide to escape and wait a while--it ferments; you get alcohol and carbon dioxide. Although “wine” is typically made from grapes, an alcoholic drink may be made from just about any fruit that has sugar and yeast; call it wine if you like ... some common non-wine wines that you will see on the shelf here in Polk County are blackberry, strawberry and peach.

Yep, it's easy to make wine, but it's hard to make wine you (and/or your friends) want to drink. Thus the winemakers' art! And it truly is a multi-faceted art. The type of grape and the soil and climate it grows in, the type of yeast, how the winemaker “cooks” them—all of these and many other factors



determine what the resulting wine will look, smell and taste like. Trust me—it ain't easy—when I was in college I tried it ... a jug of apple juice, a yeast from the lady biologist across the hall, a rubber stopper with a glass tube--into the closet. Three months later I had wine ... very thick and sweet, but nobody would drink it.

The wine we drink typically comes from a particular species of grape ... vitis vinifera. Although vitis vinifera grapes can also be used for table grapes, vinegar and raisins, most of the wines of the world are based on seven major grape varieties: three white wine grapes--chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and riesling; and four red wine grapes--cabernet sauvignon, merlot, shiraz and pinot noir. Winemakers throughout history have “tweaked” these to make

sub-species or varieties. How many varieties are there? Who knows? In the range of 5,000-10,000 named ones. Chianti? Riojas? Varietals.

Although there is red wine and white wine and shades of that in between, most people are surprised to learn that on the inside all the grapes are white. It is the grape skin that gives the wine color ... leave your cabernet grape skins in their juice and you will get red wine. Keep it separate and you will get a white wine.

When we think of wine, our first thought is often of France; in fact, France is second to Italy in wine production in 2020. Spain is third and the U.S. comes 4th, ahead of Argentina, Australia and South Africa, Chile and Germany. Not surprisingly, most of the wines we see on our local shelves are US wines ... I didn't count, but it seems that way to me. Look a little and you can find Argentina and Australia well represented,



usually a few Chilean wines and fewer still French.

But talking about wine is a little like talking to people about fishing. It doesn't take long until everybody says, “I want to try it!” So, let's do a little tasting. Let's try the most popular white wine in the world, Chardonnay. Get yourself a bottle of Lindeman Bin 65 Chardonnay. If you can't find Lindeman get Yellow Tail Chardonnay, they are similar. Price should be in the \$5 to \$8 range—if you are price sensitive, be careful ... prices can vary widely depending on where you shop.

Lindeman is an Australian wine. I have chosen it because it is a great bargain, inexpensive, widely available and popular around here. It needs to be drunk cold—your fridge is probably 38 degrees and I like these in the 38-48 degree range. Cool it, unscrew the handy top (more about screw tops later), pour a

little in a glass—any glass will do, you don't have to have a wine glass (more about wine glasses later also).

What do we have here? Straw colored, not too thick and not too thin. Take a sniff ... smells of apple, pear, and melon. Take a sip—fruity and dry (not sweet). Ruth says it is too “oaky” for her and cloying in the mouth. I like it and I usually have a bottle in the fridge.

The real test is ... do you like it? What would it go well with? BBQ chicken, salmon, roasted turkey. Remember our motto: “De gustibus non disputandum est”—there is no accounting for taste! If you don't like this wine, there are plenty of others to try. If you don't like white wine, there is plenty of red we will write about later. And, if you have a mind to, send me an email (degustibus@livingston.net) and tell me what you think.

This is just a start on the major grapes, but next time we will interrupt our discussion of the major types of wine to write a little about celebration sparkling wines—Prosecco, Cava and Champagne.

Till next time, Salud, a votre santé, or if you prefer Australian, Cheers. ■