

Easter Family Fun



Cookies to Sweeten the Holiday

Gather the family around and bake up some sweet Easter memories with these cookie recipes.

LEMON-RICOTTA COOKIES

Makes three dozen cookies. Recipe is from Taste of Home.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 large eggs at room temperature, lightly beaten
- 1 15-ounce carton of ricotta cheese
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice

- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt

Frosting

- 1 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a large bowl, beat butter and sugar until well blended. It should take about 5 minutes. Beat in eggs, ricotta, lemon juice and zest. In another bowl, combine flour, baking powder and salt. Gradually add to the butter mixture and mix well.

2. Drop by heaping tablespoonfuls three inches apart onto a greased baking sheet. Bake until lightly browned, 10-12 minutes. Cool for 2 minutes, then remove to wire racks to cool completely.

3. Combine the frosting ingredients and spread over cooled cookies. Store at room temperature for 3-4 days.

LAVENDER SHORTBREAD COOKIES

Makes four dozen cookies. Recipe is from Wilton.

Ingredients

- 1 cup confectioner's sugar
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2 teaspoons dried lavender
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Glaze

- 1 1/4 cup confectioner's sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon honey
- More dried lavender, for garnish

Directions

1. Beat confectioner's sugar, butter and lavender until well combined. Add flour and salt and make a crumbly dough. Divide dough into

two disks, then wrap it in plastic wrap and refrigerate 1-2 hours.

2. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Line cookie pans with parchment paper.

3. On a floured surface, roll each dough disk out to about a quarter-inch thick, pressing any cracks together gently. Re-roll the dough as necessary, chilling if it becomes too soft.

4. Bake 11-13 minutes or until light golden brown at the edges. Cool for 2 minutes on a pan, then remove from the pan and cool on a cooling rack.

5. Make the glaze by whisking together confectioner's sugar, milk and honey in a medium bowl until smooth. Drizzle over cooled cookies and sprinkle with lavender.

CARROT CAKE COOKIE SANDWICHES WITH CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

Makes about 20 cookies. Recipe is from The Today Show.

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup packed dark brown sugar
- 1/4 cup granulated white sugar
- 2 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger
- 2 cups freshly grated carrot
- 1 cup sweetened shredded coconut
- 1 cup chopped pecans

Frosting

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 3 tablespoons maple syrup
- 1 cup sifted powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract



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Directions

1. Whisk together flour, oats, salt, baking soda and spices. Set aside.

2. Combine butter and sugars in a stand mixer and beat 3 minutes. Add the eggs and beat 2-3 more minutes, scraping down the sides as needed, until the mixture is light and fluffy. Mix in the vanilla, add the flour and stir until fully incorporated.

3. Add the ginger, carrots, coconut and pecans.

4. Refrigerate the dough for at least an hour.

5. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. Scoop the dough into 1 1/2-inch balls and arrange two inches apart on the baking sheet. Flatten each slightly.

6. Bake 12-15 minutes or until puffy and slightly golden around the edges. The cookies should still be soft. Let cool completely.

7. Beat together the cream cheese and butter until smooth. Beat in the maple syrup, salt and vanilla, followed by the sifted confectioner's sugar. Refrigerate the frosting.

8. Match the cookies by size and fill with 1-2 spoonfuls of frosting. Close the cookies gently and press frosting out to the edges.



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Bunny Care 101

For many children, a cute little baby bunny is on their Easter wishlist.

It's important to note that a rabbit is at least a 10-year commitment, and they have care requirements beyond that of a dog or cat.

Rabbits should live indoors, says Petfinder, as they do not tolerate extreme temperatures like their wild relatives can. Domestic rabbits can literally die of fear, the site says, succumbing to a heart attack at the sight or sound of a potential predator.

KEEPING RABBITS INDOORS

Even if your rabbit will live full-time in a habitat, your home should still be rabbit proofed as much as possible. Rabbits can be escape artists and they love to chew, especially electrical cords. Some common plants can be poisonous to rabbits, such as aloe and philodendron.

YOUR RABBIT'S CAGE

A rabbit's cage should be big enough for them to easily move around, at least five times the size of the rabbit. It should be able to completely stretch out and stand up on its hind legs. Cages should not have wire floors because rabbit's feet don't have protective pads. If you do have a wire-bottomed cage, use cardboard or another material so that they are comfortable.

Rabbits should have a comfortable place to hide, as they do enjoy quiet time. Petfinder

says rabbits usually sleep during the day and night, becoming playful at dawn and dusk.

USING THE BATHROOM

Bunnies can be trained to use a litter box, Petfinder says. Place a litter box in the cage and, if your rabbit roams, place several litter boxes around the house. Don't use wood shavings in the box, as that can cause liver damage or allergic reactions, Petfinder says. Kitty litters can also cause serious health problems. Instead, go for paper, wood pulp or citrus organic litters. Hay will also encourage rabbits to use the litter box, as many of them like to have a snack while using it.

FEEDING YOUR RABBIT

A basic rabbit diet is based on Timothy grass hay. Rabbits should have a constant supply of hay as a necessary fiber to prevent health problems. You can also give leafy, dark green vegetables. Think romaine, parsley, cilantro, collard greens, arugula, endive and other greens. For treats, look to carrots, apples, blueberries, papaya, strawberries, pears, and, even more sparingly, bananas, grapes and raisins. Avoid iceberg lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage, corn, beans, peas, potatoes, beets, onions, rhubarb, grains and others.



Make Your Own Easter Candy

Baskets can be chock full of homemade candies, not just store-bought jellybeans and marshmallow bunnies. Here's how to craft a few of your own candies to brighten up your Easter baskets.

PEANUT BUTTER EGGS

Makes 16 eggs. Recipe is from Taste of Home.

Ingredients

- 3/4 cup creamy peanut butter
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 1/3 confectioner's sugar
- 1 cup graham cracker crumbs
- 1 1/2 cups dark chocolate chips
- 2 tablespoons shortening

Directions

1. Beat peanut butter, butter and vanilla until blended. Gradually beat in confectioner's sugar and cracker crumbs. Shape the mixture into 16 eggs and place them on paper-lined baking sheets. Refrigerate 30 minutes, or until firm.

2. Melt the chocolate chips and shortening in a microwave. Stir until smooth.

3. Dip the eggs in the chocolate mixture and allow the excess to drip off.

4. Return the eggs to baking sheets and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

JELLYBEAN BARK

Makes 2 pounds of candy.



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Recipe is from Allrecipes.

Ingredients

- 1 pound white confectioner's coating
- 1 pound jellybeans

Directions

1. Line a jelly roll pan with waxed paper.
2. Melt the confectioner's coating

in the top of a double boiler, stirring frequently and scraping down the sides with a spatula to avoid scorching. Spread the melted coating onto the pan. Sprinkle the jellybeans over the top.

3. Refrigerate at least an hour or until firm.

COCONUT CANDIES

Makes a dozen candies.

Recipe is from Allrecipes.

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 4 cups white sugar
- 4 cups flaked coconut
- 1 dash vanilla extract

Directions

1. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, stir together the milk

and sugar until smooth. Heat, without stirring, to between 234 and 240 degrees or until a small amount of syrup dropped into cold water forms a soft ball that flattens when removed to a flat surface.

2. Remove from heat and stir in coconut and vanilla. Let cool slightly. Drop by rounded spoonful onto waxed paper-lined sheets and let cool completely.



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Bite-Sized Sweet Treats

Get ready for Easter celebrations by whipping up a batch (or three) of cupcakes. Handheld and limited in flavors only by your imagination, cupcakes are perfect for Easter entertainments.

EASTER BIRD'S NEST CUPCAKES

Makes two dozen cupcakes. Recipe is from Pillsbury.

Ingredients

1 box milk chocolate cake mix with pudding
 1 1/4 cup water
 1/3 cup vegetable oil
 3 eggs
 2 cups milk chocolate creamy frosting
 Pastel egg-shaped candy pieces
 Chocolate sprinkles

Directions

1. Heat oven to 350. Make cake mix as directed for cupcakes using water, oil and eggs. Allow cupcakes to cool completely.

2. Frost cupcakes. Place the candies in the middle of the cupcakes like eggs in a nest. Pipe more frosting around the edges. Surround with sprinkles so it looks like a nest.

MINI CARROT CAKE CUPCAKES

Makes 48 cupcakes. Recipe is from Wilton.

Ingredients

2 cups flour
 2 cups granulated sugar
 2 tsps. baking powder
 2 tsps. ground cinnamon
 3/4 teaspoons baking soda
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 4 eggs

1 cup vegetable oil
 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
 3 cups grated carrots
 2 cups chopped pecans

Frosting

1 cup unsalted butter, softened
 2 8-ounce packages cream cheese, softened
 8 cups powdered sugar
 1 tablespoon milk
 Finely chopped pecans

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line mini cupcake pans with liners.
 2. In a medium bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, baking soda

and salt. Set aside.

3. In a large mixing bowl, beat the eggs with an electric mixer on medium speed until foamy.

4. Add the oil in a thin stream and beat well. Beat in vanilla and gradually add the flour mixture to the eggs. Mix well.

5. Fold in the carrots and pecans. Spoon the batter into the mini cupcake pans.

6. Bake for 10-14 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of a cupcake comes clean. Cool for 5 minutes in the pan and then remove to a rack to cool completely.

7. Make frosting by beating butter and cream cheese until light and fluffy. Gradually add powdered sugar and milk. Beat until smooth. Pipe frosting on the cooled cupcakes, then roll in chopped pecans.

Planting an Easter Garden

Create memories that will last all season by putting a garden in the ground as part of your family's Easter celebrations.

Spring is a great time to get your hands dirty in the garden and watching new life unfold is a reminder of the renewal of life.

KNOW YOUR ZONE

The USDA's plant hardiness map helps gardeners understand what plants are most likely to thrive at a location. The map is based on the average annual extreme minimum winter temperature. The agency hosts an interactive map that allows you to enter your ZIP code and find what zone you're in.

CHOOSE YOUR PLANTS

Pick some kid-friendly plants. HGTV suggests allium, whose round blooms can reach five feet tall; the fuzzy red blossoms of chenille plants; the otherworldly blooms of the passionflower; the giant, bobbing heads of sunflowers; clematis, with soft petals and bold colors.

Consider picking plants that are edible, too. An herb garden is a great idea, and there are lots of vegetables that are ready to start from seed in early spring.

REMOVING THE GRASS

If you've got grass that you



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need to remove from your garden, you've got several options. The quickest way is to dig out the garden area by hand. Mark off the area you'd like to turn into a garden, then cut through the grass along the edges using a flat shovel.

Water the area to soften the soil and, working in rows, use a spade to score and break up the grass. Remove the top 2-3 inches of soil and all the roots. You may need to add topsoil and compost or another soil amendment before planting.

GET PLANTING

If you're starting with seedlings, you should plant the seedlings deep enough so that the roots are completely covered and then some; up to the first leaves of the plant. Keep the soil moist for the first

week or so after the plants have been transplanted. If the temperatures dip down to freezing, you should cover them to keep them warm. Use plastic jugs with the bottom cut off to create a greenhouse effect on the plant.

Alternatives to Easter Baskets

Not every bunny needs an Easter basket. Get creative this year and make any container into a fun-filled, on-trend Easter gift. Here are some ideas.

START WITH ... A MIXING BOWL

Fill it with measuring cups, measuring spoons, silicone spatulas, whisks, cake mixes and other easy-to-make treats. You can customize this to sweet or savory, depending on the tastes of your recipient.

START WITH ... A MASON JAR

Add layers of colorful candies, then top it off with a lid and hot-glued flowers. Or bunny ears. Or both. This makes a great teacher gift that can easily be scaled up or down as you see fit.

START WITH ... A PRETTY WATERING CAN

Stack in seeds for your area, gardening gloves, a trowel and a gardening apron.

START WITH ... A PLASTIC POOL BAG

Stock it up with pool inflatables, sunglasses, towels, sunscreen and a great poolside read.

START WITH ... A FABRIC STORAGE BIN

This is a great one for the teen or tween that wants to personalize their space. Buy a set of fabric storage bins and open one, then put the rest in that bin. Top it off with LED light strings and wall decor to match their style.

START WITH ... A COFFEE MUG

Fill it with candy and a gift card to a favorite coffee shop.

START WITH ... A REUSABLE GROCERY BAG

For the college kid just starting out on their own, make a bag filled with kitchen basics, including kitchen utensils, plates, cups and silverware. Top it off with a gift card to a nearby grocery store.

START WITH ... A COOLER BAG

Toss in some reusable ice packs and a six-pack of adventurous new brews for the beer-lover in your life. For a younger recipient, you could switch to craft sodas.

START WITH ... A COLLAPSIBLE STORAGE BAG

For the family always on the go, stock this bag with car accessories, including seat protectors, cleaning wipes, a car trash can, organizers and more.

START WITH ... A SACHEL

Fill it with art supplies for the burgeoning artist on your list. Pencils, a sketchbook, paints, paintbrushes and anything else their heart desires.



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Make Your Basket a Work of Art

Dyeing Easter eggs is a tradition thousands of years old.

The ancient Persians dyed eggs to celebrate Nowruz, or the Persian New Year. Pysanky is a Ukrainian tradition that originated before the 10th century. It involves drawing on eggs with wax and dye. And, in 1290, the English King Edward I ordered eggs to be covered with gold leaf to be given as presents. Here's how to dye your eggs in a way that will make colorful memories.

TRADITIONAL EGG-DYEING WITH FOOD COLORING

Start by hard-boiling a dozen eggs. Next, grab the food coloring and vinegar. Mix half a cup of boiling water, a teaspoon of vinegar and 10-20 droops of food coloring in a cup to achieve desired colors. Dip the eggs in the dye mixture for about five minutes, then remove them to dry.

ONION SKIN DYES

Use leftover onion skins to make earth-toned eggs. Wrap tape or rubber bands around your (raw) eggs to make patterns. Boil the eggs with onion skins for nine minutes. For a darker brown, go longer.

MOD PODGE EGGS

You might want to try this one on faux eggs instead of ones you plan to eat. Use Mod Podge to transfer pretty paper patterns into your eggs.



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Napkins are a great and cost-effective place to start. If your napkins are two-ply, separate the layers and only use the patterned one. Brush the egg with Mod Podge, then place your napkin on the egg. Add more ModPodge to the top and smooth it out the best you can. Put the egg on wax paper to dry. Consider layer-

ing napkins for a vintage look.

MARbled EGGS

This is a technique you can use on real eggs. It gives you a beautiful, marbled look. Start by dyeing your eggs a solid light color. After all your eggs are dry, add a tablespoon of oil to the dye. You can also add more dye to make darker

colors. Using a spoon, roll the egg around, paying attention to how the oil manipulates the color. Remove the eggs and allow them to dry completely before handling.

WHIPPED CREAM EGGS

Fill a baking sheet with whipped cream until it's about an inch thick, then smooth it

out with a spatula. Drip food coloring onto the cream and be generous with it for brighter colors. Swirl the food coloring with a toothpick. Don some gloves, then put a hard-boiled egg in the cream, rolling it to coat it completely. Remove the eggs to a paper towel and let them dry for 20 minutes. Wipe the cream off.