

# Exchanging cookies and fun for the holidays

**W**e are always looking for fun things to do with our friends and families, especially during the holidays. Like coffee klatches, cookie exchanges, with their relaxed atmosphere, are a great way to entertain family and friends as well as to meet people. A cookie exchange is perfect — how often can you focus on enjoying sweets?

I learned about cookie exchanges when I moved to Illinois in 1996. My next door neighbor suggested I have an exchange as a way to get to know my other neighbors. The cookie exchanges were so much fun that I had them for the next three years. As our children got older, I started having them with their friends in the neighborhood. I have gotten so many great recipes from these events.

## A family favorite

When it comes to cookies, I love making biscotti. I use lots of toasted almonds. This recipe is a great one to make ahead and the biscotti freeze very well. They also ship well.

The word cookie is derived from the Dutch word *koekje*, meaning “little cake.” Biscuit comes from the Latin word *bis coctum*, which means, “twice cooked,” and then evolved to *biscotti* in Italian, which of course means “twice cooked.”

According to food historians, the first historic use of cookies was when bakers used a small amount of the batter to test oven temperature to bake larger cakes.

Another reason biscotti or cookies gained popularity is because of the lack of refrigeration. As people were traveling more, they needed foods that wouldn't go bad along the way. Baking cookies twice removed all the moisture in them to prevent spoiling. Like many foods, cookies were developed to withstand the test of time.

In the United States, biscotti evolved from the basic long cookie filled with nuts and dried fruit to a decadent chocolate dipped cookie. If you wish to taste a more traditional biscotti, look for them at a local Italian grocery store or bakery. Cantucci are small, bite-size biscotti from Tuscany that are



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sweetened and have nuts in them. They are very hard, so be sure to dip them in a glass of Vin Santo (a sweet dessert wine) or a cup of coffee to soften them before you take a bite.

## Exchanging ideas

Here are some ideas to consider when planning your own cookie exchange:

### MARY ROSE'S BEST:

## • Biscotti •

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 3 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup softened butter
- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- 4 TB brandy or any liquor of your choice
- ½ TB each of vanilla and almond extract
- 2 cups roughly chopped toasted almonds



#### DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. I recommend using either Silpat baking sheets or parchment paper. You will need at least two cookie sheets.
2. Combine flour, baking powder, and salt. Set aside.
3. In a large bowl of an electric mixer, beat the butter and sugar until light and creamy.
4. Beat in the eggs one at a time. Beat in vanilla, almond extract, and brandy.
5. On low speed stir in the nuts. Still on low speed, add in the flour mixture, about a cup at a time until just combined. Knead by hand for a couple minutes to incorporate all ingredients.
6. Shape the dough by rolling it into four 12 inch by 1 ½ inch logs. Place on the prepared baking sheets. You can smooth the sides with a rubber spatula if needed.
7. Bake for 20 minutes, or until the logs are lightly browned and firm when pressed lightly in the center. Remove from the oven, but don't turn the oven off. Let the logs cool for about 10 minutes.
8. Slide the logs onto a cutting board and using a serrated knife cut diagonally into ½ inch-thick slices. Place the biscotti on their sides back on the cookies sheets. Bake for about 8 minutes. Then turn them over and bake again for about 8 minutes.
9. Transfer to wire racks to cool. If stored in an airtight container, they can last for weeks. If frozen, they can last for a few months.

I always had my exchanges on a Sunday afternoon. It seemed it was the best time because you didn't need a babysitter and you had all of Saturday to bake.

I invited up to 24 people assuming only half can make it. Ask that a recipe is included for each batch of cookies when sending out invitations. Make sure your R.S.V.P. is at least one week before the exchange. This will give you time to figure out how many cookies your guests need to make and to give everyone plenty of time to make them.

Make sure you ask on your invite what cookie they are planning to bring when they R.S.V.P. and write it down next to their name. Share why you need what cookie they are making and suggest they are prepared with a back up if there is already a certain type of cookie submitted. This way you can avoid exchanging 12 different types of chocolate chip cookies.

I began collecting large, white buckets that held frostings or fillings from local bakeries a few months before my first exchange. Once I had one for each guest, I decorated the buckets with wrapping paper. These buckets are perfect for taking all your goodies home in, and you only need to do this for the first time. Remind your guests to bring their buckets next time. U



*Here are a few Web sites  
I found very helpful for  
planning a fun and unique  
cookie exchange.*

*Good baking!*

- [www.robinsweb.com/cookies/index.html](http://www.robinsweb.com/cookies/index.html)
- [www.doityourself.com/stry/cookieexchange](http://www.doityourself.com/stry/cookieexchange)
- [www.allrecipes.com/HowTo/How-to-Host-a-Cookie-Exchange-Party/Detail.aspx](http://www.allrecipes.com/HowTo/How-to-Host-a-Cookie-Exchange-Party/Detail.aspx)



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