

COOKIES KIE S

Entertaining guru **KELLEY MOORE** dresses up the annual holiday baking tradition

IF YOU'RE LUCKY ENOUGH TO FIND TIME TO DO SO DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON, BAKING COOKIES IS A CHOICE OPPORTUNITY TO SLOW THE FRANTIC PACE, REVEL IN THE FAMILIAR AND HAVE A MOMENT WHEN THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION BEFORE YOU IS WHETHER A FRESHLY BAKED GINGERBREAD MAN DESERVES RED OR SILVER BUTTONS.



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This year, though, the gingerbread man (or woman) might be garbed in plaid or leather. Or in the sexy little number that Jennifer Aniston wore to the Oscars. No longer the stodgy, stiff fellow running for his life, he's stepping out of the oven wearing couture ensembles. And right beside this makeover is a queue of other novel cookie ideas just waiting to spring to life.

I spent an afternoon with Betsey Toombs and Caryn Truitt, owners of Cookies, a specialty cookie decorating supply store in Ballard, and discovered that one can now press any type of silhouette into dough from tiaras to tractors (even scrooges can get into the spirit by creating confections that spell out "bah humbug"). The owners of this cozy little shop are busy with colored sugars, edible glitters and dragees ready to create catwalk-worthy confections.

"When we were growing up, decorating cookies meant deciding between red and green sprinkles at your local grocery store," says Toombs. "Today, the possibilities are endless."

And thank goodness—one of my favorite things to do during the holidays is to gather my multi-tasking girlfriends for an evening of chocolate cosmopolitans and cookie baking and decorating. They're sure to enjoy some of the new twists on the holiday cookie shape including crisply cool iced-blue snowflakes and miniature mittens. I particularly like cookie cutters in shape of couture gowns that echo the fun of dressing up for the holidays. Photographs of your favorite celebrity dresses from magazines are the perfect place to find inspiration to create these miniature, edible versions.

When all is done, whether it's sending your guests home with their cookies or preparing a hostess gift, presentation and coordinated packaging is key. A see-through vinyl handbag-like tote, lined with a sophisticated textured striped paper, is perfect for the dresses, for example. Packaging should be portable and easy, so look for containers with handles, like a fanciful lunch box or take-out container. "The trends in packaging this year are irregular shapes accented with hot colors," says Mary Neuschwanger from Packaging Specialties, the center-of-the-universe for such supplies. "Greens are grassier, and reds tend to have an orange or pink tone." There are no rules so don't be afraid to combine a funky striped or polka dot box with a traditional satin or velvet ribbon.

By evening's end, the day's craziness will have dashed out the door and you'll have hosted anything but a cookie cutter event.



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- tips for throwing a great cookie-making party
- Plan early The holidays are a busy time of year so plan early to capture momentum and to guarantee participation from friends and family.
- Keep it intimate Limit guests to four or six so everyone has enough space to work
- Create a signature seasonal drink I recommend chocolate martinis (RECIPE?)
- Set the environment Music -WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO PLAY/RECOMMEND TO PLAY
- Pre-bake AS A TIME SAVER, Make the dough, CUT THE SHAPE AND BAKE COOKIES prior to your guests arriving, HAVING THEM ready for decorating.
- Eat dinner while the cookies bake and cool Ordering takeout you're your favorite local restaurant eliminates the need to cook.
- Layer activities Combine the afternoon around the stove with other traditions of the season. Card making or composing the family holiday letter are good occupations to fill the baking time.
- Provide a variety of materials ???? DO YOU MEAN SPARKLY SUGAR, ETC.