

SOFT AND CHEWY MOLASSES SPICE COOKIES

MAKES ABOUT 22 COOKIES

Measure the molasses in a liquid measuring cup. If you find that the dough sticks to your palms as you shape the balls, moisten your hands occasionally in a bowl filled with cold water and shake off the excess. Bake the cookies one sheet at a time. If baked two sheets at a time, the cookies started on the bottom rack won't develop the attractive cracks. The cookies should look slightly raw and underbaked when removed from the oven. If you plan to glaze the cookies (see recipe below), save the parchment paper used to bake them.

- 1/3 cup (about 2 1/3 ounces) granulated sugar, plus 1/2 cup for dipping
- 2 1/4 cups (11 1/4 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon table salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/4 teaspoon finely ground black pepper
- 12 tablespoons (1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened but still cool
- 1/3 cup packed (about 2 1/2 ounces) dark brown sugar
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup (about 6 ounces) light or dark molasses (see right)

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Place 1/2 cup sugar for dipping in 8- or 9-inch cake pan.

2. Whisk flour, baking soda, salt, and spices in medium bowl until thoroughly combined; set aside.

3. In standing mixer fitted with paddle attachment, beat butter with brown and granulated sugars at medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Reduce speed to medium-low and add yolk and vanilla; increase speed to medium and beat until incorporated, about 20 seconds. Reduce speed to medium-low and add molasses; beat until fully incorporated, about 20 seconds, scraping bottom and sides of bowl once with rubber spatula. Reduce speed to lowest setting; add flour mixture and beat until just incorporated, about 30 seconds, scraping bowl down once. Give dough final stir with rubber spatula to ensure that no pockets of flour remain at bottom. Dough will be soft.

4. Using tablespoon measure, scoop heaping tablespoon of dough and roll between palms into 1 1/2-inch ball; drop ball into cake pan with sugar and repeat to form about 4 balls. Toss balls in sugar to coat and set on prepared baking sheet, spacing them about 2 inches apart. Repeat with

TASTING: The Best Molasses for Cookies

Molasses is a byproduct of the cane sugar-refining process. It is the liquid that is drawn off after the cane juice has been boiled and undergone crystallization. The resulting molasses is then subjected to two subsequent boilings. With each boiling, the molasses grows increasingly dark, bitter, and potent as more sugar is extracted.

There are three different types of molasses. Light, or mild, molasses comes from the first boiling, dark molasses from the second, and blackstrap from the third. In the past, sulfur dioxide was often added to molasses to clarify it. Although this process makes molasses look more attractive, it adds an unappealing flavor. Today, most molasses on the market is unsulfured.

Grocery store shelves are not packed with molasses options. Grandma's is the baseline offering, and Brer Rabbit brand can be found in well-stocked supermarkets nationwide. Blackstrap molasses is commonly available in natural foods stores. We made cookies with five different bottles of molasses. Tasters liked both brands of light and dark molasses but found blackstrap molasses too overpowering in a cookie. The moral of the story: Buy either light or dark molasses based on your preference for a mellow or intense molasses flavor. —D.Y.



➤ **Grandma's Mild Flavor** Cookies made with this molasses had a warm bronze color. The molasses flavor was solid, decently rich, and "nicely balanced." Good for those who like molasses flavor but not its bitterness.

➤ **Grandma's Robust Flavor** This molasses filled the cookies with both dark color (akin to a chocolate cookie) and deep flavor. They were criticized as "too strong" by one taster but touted as "spicy and rich" by another.

➤ **Brer Rabbit Mild Flavor** Noteworthy was the lovely sepia color of the cookies made with this molasses. The cookies garnered comments such as "complex and nuanced" and "fruity" with a "clean finish."

➤ **Brer Rabbit Full Flavor** These cookies had an even richer sepia color than those made with mild Brer Rabbit. "Straight-up" and "smooth" molasses flavor without so much as a trace of bitterness.

➤ **Plantation Blackstrap** A couple of tasters admired the potent molasses flavor, but most others remarked that the molasses was so overwhelming that the spices could hardly be tasted. User discretion advised.

remaining dough. Bake 1 sheet at a time until cookies are browned, still puffy, and edges have begun to set but centers are still soft (cookies will look raw between cracks and seem underdone), about 11 minutes, rotating baking sheet halfway through baking. Do not overbake.

5. Cool cookies on baking sheet 5 minutes, then use wide metal spatula to transfer cookies to wire rack; cool cookies to room temperature and serve. (Can be stored at room temperature in airtight container or zipper-lock plastic bag up to 5 days.)

MOLASSES SPICE COOKIES WITH DARK RUM GLAZE

For the glaze, start by adding the smaller amount of rum; if the glaze is too thick to drizzle, whisk in up to an additional 1/2 tablespoon rum.

Follow recipe for Soft and Chewy Molasses Spice Cookies. When completely cool, return cookies to cooled parchment-lined baking sheets. Whisk 1 cup confectioners' sugar (about 4 1/2

ounces) and 2 1/2 to 3 tablespoons dark rum in medium bowl until smooth. Dip spoon into glaze and then move spoon over cookies so that glaze drizzles down onto them; repeat as necessary. Transfer cookies to wire rack and allow glaze to dry, 10 to 15 minutes.

MOLASSES SPICE COOKIES WITH ORANGE ESSENCE

The orange zest in the sugar coating causes the sugar to become sticky and take on a light orange hue; the baked cookies have a unique frosty look.

In workbowl of food processor, process 2/3 cup granulated sugar and 2 teaspoons grated orange zest until pale orange, about 10 seconds; transfer sugar to 8- or 9-inch cake pan and set aside. Follow recipe for Soft and Chewy Molasses Spice Cookies, adding 1 teaspoon grated orange zest to butter and sugars along with molasses in step 3 and substituting orange sugar for granulated sugar when coating dough balls in step 4.