

"And Visions of Sugar Plums..."

by Lydia Lovell

Christmas without cookies and candy? Unthinkable. And what could be more delicious and festive than Christmas cookies heaped on a plate and passed among friends who stop in to share holiday cheer? A mug of coffee, a cup of tea, cocoa with a marshmallow floating on top, and cookies... is there a better way to demonstrate happy holiday spirits?

And no need to stop at cookies, either. Edible Christmas trimmings and decorations add to fun and, if you start early, you'll find time for making these quick treats. You might plan to use edible little Christmas trees for place cards on your table this year. Children love helping when you make decorations; they can be remarkably creative, too.

First assemble all the makings: popping corn, red cinnamon candies, food colorings, a package of ice cream cones. Commence by popping about three cups of corn. Prepare an icing by beating the white of one small egg until soft peaks form, then gradually beat in two cups of confectioners sugar. Tint light green with a couple of drops of food coloring. If icing is too stiff to spread, add about half-a-teaspoon of water and stir well. Use a table knife to cover six cones completely with icing, using about two tablespoonfuls on each. Before icing stiffens, decorate trees with popcorn and cinnamon candies. For glisten, sprinkle lightly with green-tinted granulated sugar. Let dry.

Or make your own cookie dough and cut into different shapes; use a doughnut cutter to make wreath-shaped cookies and decorate just as you did the ice-cream-cone trees. Form red bows on wreaths from snipped candied cherries. Aunt Olivia used this basic mixture for many different Christmas Cookies.

1 C. butter or margarine
1 C. sugar
1 egg

1 t. almond extract
3 C. sifted flour

In a medium bowl, cream butter and sugar thoroughly. Add egg and almond extract while beating. Stir in the flour. Pat dough out in a thin sheet (1/4") on wax paper. Flour your fingers if dough is sticky. Use cookie cutters or a table knife to cut dough in desired shapes. Transfer to an ungreased cookie sheet with a spatula and bake at 350° for 12 minutes or until very lightly browned. These cookies can be decorated with icing, sprinkled with multicolored sugar, or while still hot, topped with a half-teaspoon of jelly.

Deciding which of Aunt Olivia's collection of Christmas treats to suggest you prepare this year is difficult, for there are a great many recipes to choose from; perhaps you'd like to begin with two which were particular favorites among the menfolk of the Lovell family. The first is **Bourbon Balls**; Uncle Henry would stir these up himself and, since no cooking at all is necessary, he made them often.

2-1/2 C. vanilla wafers,
crushed [1 pkg. wafers]
2 T. cocoa

1 C. finely chopped walnuts
2 T. white corn syrup
1/4 C. bourbon

In a measuring cup, mix corn syrup and bourbon. In a medium bowl, combine dry ingredients and stir until evenly blended. Add liquid and stir well. Form balls about the size of a small walnut by rolling pieces of dough between your palms. Roll balls in powdered sugar and they are ready to eat immediately. Good? Yes, indeed.



Almost as simple, even though they require some cooking are **Rum Balls**. These have a totally different texture and flavor... and are equally as delicious.

1 stick margarine
1 egg
1/2 lb. pkg. dates
1/2 t. salt
Shredded coconut

1/2 C. nuts
1 t. vanilla extract
1/2 t. rum extract
2 C. rice krispies

In a medium saucepan, melt a stick of margarine and remove from heat. In a small bowl, combine a slightly beaten egg with chopped dates, salt and chopped nuts. (Use walnuts, pecans, or mixed nuts. If using salted nuts, eliminate salt from recipe.) Add nut mixture to melted margarine. Return to heat and cook, stirring constantly and watching to be sure it doesn't scorch, until boiling and bubbly. Remove from heat and allow to cool. Add vanilla and rum extracts and rice krispies. Form into small balls by rolling between palms. Roll in shredded coconut. Rum balls keep well in tins; they even improve with age. If made weeks ahead, you may prefer to freeze them.

Although both Bourbon Balls and Rum Balls are delicious and can be savored equally by either gentlemen or ladies, my mother and Aunt Olivia preferred **Butter Balls**, and you may too.

1 C. butter at room temp.
3 T. confectioners sugar
1 t. vanilla extract

1 t. almond extract
2 C. sifted flour
1 C. shredded blanched almonds

In a small bowl, cream butter until light; while still beating, add sugar gradually. Add almond and vanilla extracts. Work in flour and nuts, mixing well. Form dough into bite-sized balls, smaller than a walnut. Bake on ungreased cookie sheet at 350° for about 20 minutes. While still warm, roll in confectioners sugar; repeat after Butter Balls have cooled.

Of all Christmas cookies, the ones that will always seem to me most traditional are the delectable confection Aunt Olivia called **Crescent Cookies**. No substitutions, please.

1 C. butter
1/2 C. confectioners sugar
2 C. flour
1 t. salt

1/2 C. chopped walnuts or pecans
1 T. vanilla extract
1 T. almond extract

Additional chopped nuts

In a large bowl, cream butter, softened to room temperature, until light. Gradually add sugar and vanilla and almond extracts. Combine flour and salt and, alternating with finely-chopped nuts, slowly add to butter. Mix until creamy. Roll approximately one tablespoon of dough between palms into a nugget. Shape into a crescent. Bake on ungreased cookie sheet at 350° for 25 minutes. Roll first in additional finely-chopped nuts and then in confectioners sugar. Store in an airtight tin.

Candies were as much a part of seasonal celebrations as cookies, and Uncle Henry always laid in a big box of ribbon candy, a supply of after-dinner mints, and a generous-sized bag of chocolate kisses. From her own recipe, Aunt Olivia made this **Christmas Confection**. We children enjoyed taking a hand in shaping the candy as well as sharing its goodness.

1/2 C. butter at room temp.
5 C. confectioners sugar
(unsifted)

1/4 C. whipping cream
1 t. vanilla

In a medium bowl, cream butter thoroughly. Add sugar slowly, continuing to beat until mixture is light and crumbly. Blend in cream and vanilla, continuing to beat. Divide dough into portions and tint different colors with food coloring, if desired. Dough is ready to shape or can be refrigerated until later. After shaping candy, store in a cool place or freeze.

Using patterns cut as follows from 3x5 cards, different holiday-shaped candies can be created. Cut one triangle, 2-1/4" on each side. Cut another, 1" on each side. Cut a circle, 2-1/4" in diameter. Flatten dough to about 1/4" thick; trace around patterns with a table knife dipped in confectioners sugar to prevent sticking. Combine pieces as follows, or make your own designs.



Christmas is the most exciting holiday in all the year especially for children... and who among us can't recapture that excitement as December 25th draws near?