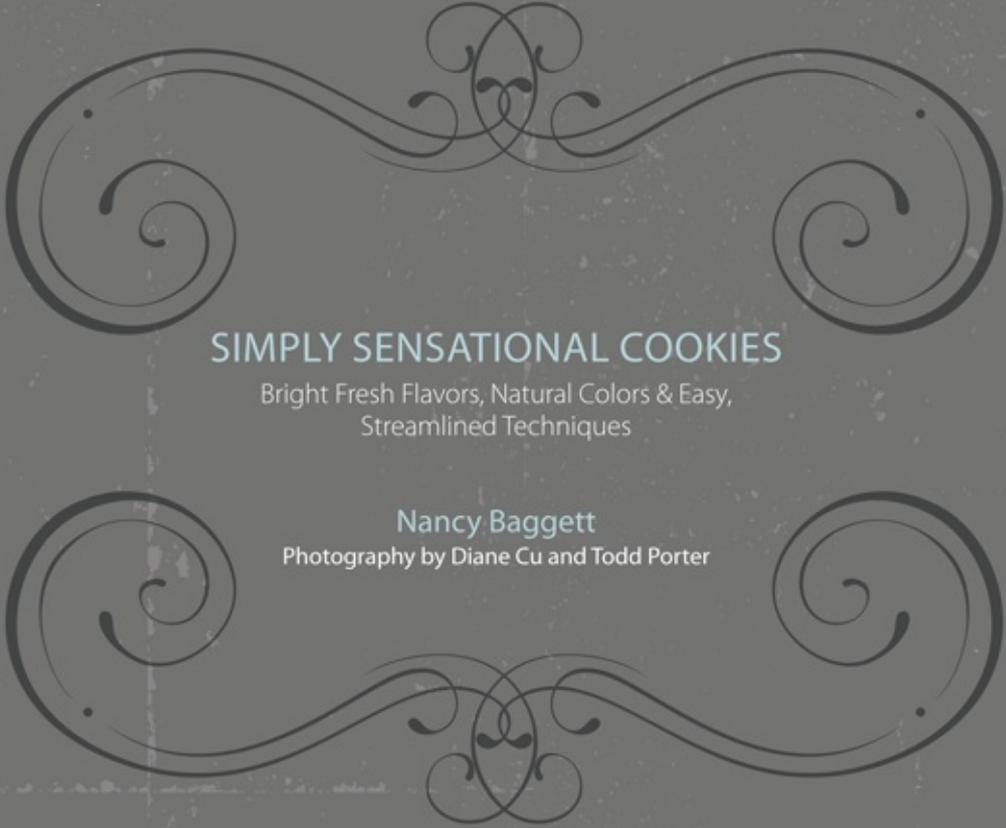


Simply Sensational Cookies

Bright Fresh Flavors, Natural Colors
& Easy, Streamlined
Techniques



Nancy Baggett | Photography by Diane Cu and Todd Porter

The cover features two large, symmetrical decorative flourishes. Each flourish consists of a central circular motif with intricate scrollwork, from which two long, sweeping lines extend outwards to form large, open loops. The flourishes are rendered in a light gray color against a dark, textured background.

SIMPLY SENSATIONAL COOKIES

Bright Fresh Flavors, Natural Colors & Easy,
Streamlined Techniques

Nancy Baggett

Photography by Diane Cu and Todd Porter



JOHN WILEY & SONS, INC.

Copyright © 2013 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved.

Photography copyright 2013 by Diane Cu and Todd Porter

Cover Image: Diane Cu and Todd Porter

Cover Design: Suzanne Sunwoo

Interior Design: idesign, inc.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400, fax 978-646-8600, or on the web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, 201-748-6011, fax 201-748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services, or technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at 800-762-2974, outside the United States at 317-572-3993 or fax 317-572-4002.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Baggett, Nancy

Simply sensational cookies : bright fresh flavors, natural colors & easy, streamlined techniques / Nancy Baggett ; photography by Diane Cu and Todd Porter.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-470-27868-0 (cloth); 978-1-118-11056-0 (ebk); 978-1-118-11057-7 (ebk); 978-1-118-11058-4 (ebk)

1. Cookies. I. Title.

TX772.B29 2013

641.86'54--dc23

2011042968

Printed in China

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Cookie-Baking Basics](#)

[Handy Cookie-Baking Questions & Answers](#)

[Extra-Easy Cookies](#)

[Drop Cookies](#)

[Hand-Shaped Cookies](#)

[Rolled Cookies](#)

[Brownies & Bars](#)

[Slice & Bake Cookies](#)

[Biscotti](#)

[Semisweet Crisps, Savory Cocktail Cookies & Crackers](#)

[Cookies-in-Jars Mixes & Bars-in-Jars Mixes](#)

[No-Bake Cookies](#)

[Semi-Homemade Cookies](#)

[Master Dough, Fancy Cookies & Decorating Projects](#)

[Frostings, Fillings & Finishing Touches](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Many people played a part in creating this book. I'm proud of it and am very grateful to all those who helped make it happen.

First, a huge thank you to Justin Schwartz, my editor, and the whole Wiley team, for being committed to quality and for making *Simply Sensational Cookies* the best it could possibly be. A book of this size and with full color and photography throughout is a huge undertaking for a publisher, and I am thrilled with the results. Jackie Beach, senior production editor, Jolinda Rivera, the book's interior designer, and Suzanne Sunwoo, the cover designer, all need to take a bow. Thanks, too, to the publicity staff, especially Claire Holzman, and to editorial assistant Eden Bunchuck for helping with many details.

I'm grateful to the enormously talented Diane Cu and Todd Porter, whose spectacular photographs for the book still take my breath away. Not only did they deliver far more than I hoped for, but they were a great pleasure to work with. Thanks, as well, to Nancy Buchanan, who so ably and cheerfully assisted us during the photo shoot.

Thanks to Judith Riven, my literary agent, for her enthusiasm, very professional representation, and steadying presence over a project that spanned more than five years.

Many thanks to my recipe testers: My kitchen assistants Linda Kirschner and Judy Silver Weisberg helped test many of the recipes, and Erica Horting also tested a number of them. Connie Hay, Sally Churgai, and Stephanie Lowell provided help as well.

Another big thank you goes to an enthusiastic group of volunteer testers who made recipes in their own kitchens, then carefully rated them for ease of preparation, taste, texture, and appearance. Their feedback was thoughtful and constructive and helped make the recipes better and more user-friendly. In alphabetical order they are: Steven Blaski, Jilda Bolton, Dixie Broyles, Sallie Buttler, Judy Carter, Susan Colletti, Pam Cote, Kit Ellis, Vicki Gensini, Monica Greaney, Rose Gullledge, Janet Holliday, Kate Marvel, Deb Melnyk, Cindy Nelson, Cindy Pauldine, Deborah Ross, Margo Sety, and Elaine Wallace.

Thank you to the friends and colleagues in my writers' group, who have been sampling and rating my recipes and critiquing my prose over literally decades. Their steadfast support and expertise has definitely made me a better writer, and perhaps a better baker and cook. I have also learned a lot from the various food editors and publishers I've written for over the years and appreciate their confidence in me and their enthusiasm for my work. Additionally, many fine cookbook authors and bakers (some I know well and others I've never met) have inspired me and shown the way towards excellence. More recently, numerous culinary bloggers and Twitter and Facebook foodie friends have shared knowledge and enthusiastically lent their support.

Finally, thanks to my wonderful family. They are my biggest advocates and enrich my professional and personal life in countless ways. They have been springboards for ideas, guinea pigs for recipes in progress, and honest (but never harsh) critics of my work. My husband, Charlie, who has been cheering me on and providing wise counsel since the very beginning, sometimes tactfully says, "It's good enough for me to eat, but not good enough to put in a cookbook!" (Obviously, he understands the taster's role very well.) The youngest family in the family, my grandchildren Charlie and Lizzie, are my most loyal baking companions, as well as a constant reminder that cookies are not only about creating great sweet treats to eat but about bonding and sharing good times.

INTRODUCTION



Times change. People change. Cookies do, too.

The cookie repertoire I remember from childhood was pretty different from today's. Everybody and his brother (or more likely his mother or grandmother) served up molasses-spiced gingerbread, and raisin cookies. People made lots of oatmeal cookies, sugar cookies, and date bars, as well. But except for brownies and chocolate chip cookies, the chocolate offerings were slim. And cookies tended to be quite small.

Chocolate chip cookies were very popular but came in only two basic styles—those with a bare minimum of chocolate morsels and those with fewer! Cooks were frugal then and routinely skimmed on add-ins, whether nuts, fruit, or chocolate bits. My grandmother, a good baker, would have considered my [One-Bowl Big Chocolate-Chocolate Chip Cookies](#), which call for a pound of chocolate morsels for about 30 cookies, scandalous!

I don't recollect anybody ever serving chocolate-chocolate chippers or mocha chocolate chip cookies, or any of today's interesting variations on the original Toll House theme. Nobody tossed chocolate chips into peanut butter or oatmeal cookies or brownies, either, probably because people just weren't into experimenting much. Besides that, the Nestlé morsels weren't introduced until 1939, and it took a while for folks to realize their full potential (Butterscotch, peanut butter, and white chocolate morsels weren't even a gleam in the Nestlé product developers' eyes.)

Fast-forward to the 1980s and '90s, and the cookie scene was dramatically changed. Cookies were often large (even monsters!), and much more sumptuous than before. They were beginning to feature more complex flavor combinations and assorted morsels. Sometimes they contained several different kinds of chips, nuts, and fruits all at once. These extravaganzas were dubbed "[Kitchen Sink](#)"; check out my latest version. Big, plump white chocolate-macadamia cookies (and other white chocolate cookies, too) were the rage—my son requested them instead of a cake for his birthday parties!

Today we're moving forward again—into what could be described as the era of "high-impact cookies." Our palates are more sophisticated than ever; they've come to expect lots of "wow" power. Cookies can't just sit there on the plate or in the mouth: They have to taste and smell fabulous, look fabulous, feel fabulous on our tongue, and, yes, *sound* fabulous as they're being munched. Even the simplest, most traditional kinds, like shortbreads, butter wafers, and such, need to stand out, make a statement, and wrestle all our senses to the ground.

The kicker: Although everybody's taste buds are looking for cookies that deliver *more*, more home bakers are looking for recipes that require *less* from them. Everybody's super busy. Plus, many ardent cookie makers aren't experienced at baking. To complicate the matter even further, lots of us have now become interested in eating more less-processed, from-scratch foods and in limiting dyes and similar chemicals in our diets.

This is why, though I've authored two previous well-received cookie books, I'm compelled to tackle my favorite subject again. While my previous works mostly paid homage to popular recipes from the past, this book celebrates what's current and up and coming in cookies. There are so many new, easy, all-natural ways of heightening flavor, aroma, and texture in both classic and modern cookies, as well as methods of streamlining and simplifying preparations, that I just *have* to share them with you.

Simply Sensational Cookies is new and different in a number of ways. First, at the top level

next to each recipe title you'll find a very handy doability rating from extra easy to fairly difficult, plus a few abbreviated descriptors highlighting the recipe's key attributes. These include remarks such as "very versatile," "elegance with ease," "make-ahead convenience," "au naturel," to help you quickly assess recipes without having to read through them. Here are some other important new features.

EASY ONE-BOWL (OR ONE-SAUCEPAN) MIXING

Many of the recipes skip the traditional beating, or "creaming," of butter and sugar. Instead, the butter is quickly softened or fully melted in a microwave-safe bowl or saucepan, then the other ingredients go in. After a stirring or mixing, and, perhaps, a brief chilling, the dough gets shaped and baked.

This streamlined approach often yields much better results than creaming, because more compact dough produces cookies with more concentrated flavor and a chewy, rather than cakey, texture. It also eliminates the task of figuring out when butter is the right consistency for creaming, which is sometimes a tricky matter for newbie bakers. The old-fashioned method is probably a holdover from the days before baking soda and baking powder came along (in the 1700 and 1800s). Often, these leavening ingredients lighten cookies to the point that creaming is unnecessary.

Another streamlined approach you'll find here involves grinding certain cookie ingredients, like nuts, herbs, citrus zest, or chocolate, together with the sugar in a food processor, then incorporating the butter and flour as well. This eliminates tedious chopping by hand, quickly cuts the butter into the dry ingredients, and boosts appeal by thoroughly infusing the sugar and butter with the flavors of the nuts, herbs, and so forth. In some recipes, such as my super-easy, five-ingredient [Iced Little Lemon Drops](#), the sugar-butter-lemon mixture actually does double-duty and serves as the base for both the dough and frosting.

FRESH, INTENSE, NATURAL FLAVORS

Simply Sensational recipes crank up flavor by taking advantage of both old and new ingredients in expected and novel ways—everything from fresh and dried herbs, sea salt, and freeze-dried berries and berry powders to citrus zests, green tea, and occasionally even ground chiles, pepper, and edible flowers get put to work! (Don't worry; most items are readily available and, when necessary, I suggest local or Internet sources.) Interestingly, people usually can't put their finger on what's unique about the various herb- and chile-enhanced cookies—they just find the faintly exotic, unfamiliar flavors surprising and highly addictive.

This is certainly true of the [Lavender-Lemon Garden Party Meltaways](#). Please banish any skepticism—lavender has an elusive, irresistible spicy-floral character that many folks discover they really love. Likewise, in the [Cranberry, Orange, And Sage Cookies](#) the sage adds a special, unexpected flavor dimension that most folks aren't able to identify but greatly enjoy.

Thanks to freeze-dried raspberries and strawberries and berry powders now on the market, it's possible to pack far more pure, intense berry taste into cookies than ever before: My revamped chocolate-raspberry brownies are not only the fudgiest, but the fruitiest and most aromatic I've ever created. And the naturally pale pink [Very Strawberry \(Or Very Raspberry\) Sugar Dusties](#) shortbreads, which not only contain but also are rolled in berry powder and confectioners' sugar, burst with fruit flavor.

A few recipes even benefit from naturally cooling mint leaves or hot, puckery elements in the sensory mix: The [Spiced Mexican Chocolate Cookies](#), for example, include a little smoked paprika and cayenne, which, trust me, add wonderful warmth to the chocolate-spice taste and wow all but very timid eaters.

AU NATUREL DECORATING TECHNIQUES AND RECIPES

Decorating with bright but bland commercial sprinkles and colored sugars is traditional, but misses a huge opportunity to build in more aroma and taste with well-flavored toppings. And means introducing food dyes, some of which are allergens or irritants for certain people.

So, using a food processor, you can create a whole assortment of quick-to-make but highly aromatic and *naturally colorful* citrus, herb, spice, berry, and flower decorating sugars and powders that can replace the store-bought kind. Instead of just sitting there looking pretty, these naturally attractive garnishes deliver a one-two punch to the taste buds *and* the olfactory sensors every time a cookie goes to the lips. This book also serves up a large and interesting array of tempting frostings, glazes, and even nifty homemade sprinkles that get most or all of their color from natural ingredients, as well as other fresh, all-natural garnishes and finishing touches.

Of course, purchased decors and sugars are still an option: The new homemade versions just provide a tastier and possibly healthier alternative. (And most of them are surprisingly easy, too.) Since my grandchildren are always snitching the sprinkles and icings when we decorate cookies, and the whole family eats them, the au naturel way has particular appeal for me.

MORE MEMORABLE AND ENTICING COOKIE TEXTURES

A significant part of the pleasure of a really good cookie is its texture, so a lot of testing has gone into ensuring that the snaps in the book really snap, the brittle wafers shatter, and the ooey-goey cookies are exactly that. One current (delightful!) trend is cookies simultaneously serving up two textures—chewy-crispness at the edges and chewy-softness in the center. The buttery, brown sugary [Butterscotch Chewies](#) and [Ultimate One-Bowl Chocolate Chippe \(Or Chunkers\)](#) are just two good examples of this wonderfully sumptuous chewy-crispy style.

The book also picks up on a modern trend and provides assorted “crossover” cookies—one bringing together both cracker and cookie characteristics, with really fresh, fun results. Some like the [Sweet and Crunchy Chocolate Chip Crisps](#) and the [Sweet and Salty Peanut Crisps](#) are reminiscent of classic Toll House or peanut butter cookies but are light, thin, and irresistibly crisp. Some, like the [Herbed Chèvre Nuggets](#) and the [Cranberry and Fig Conserve–Stuffed Blue and Cheddar Cheese Cocktail Sandwich Cookies](#), have the tender texture and look of butter cookies but make great cocktail nibbles. And some, like the [O-Cured Black Olive And Black Pepper Biscotti](#) and the [Savory Sun-Dried Tomato and Tapenade Cocktail Rugelach](#), are made *exactly* the same way as classic versions, but are savory instead of sweet.

The crunchy, pleasant-to-munch-on texture of biscotti is also in demand these days, so there’s a grab bag of old favorites like almond, citrus, and chocolate biscotti along with more unusual offerings like spiced espresso-orange, mocha-hazelnut, saffron, and ice cream gingerbread.



BACK TO THE BEGINNING



I've been making cookies for as long as I can remember. I don't think there's any other kitchen activity that's more fun or that creates more fond and lasting memories.

My first recollections are of helping my mother, and occasionally my grandmother, measure mix, and bake sugar cookies and date-spice drops.

We lived in what was then a sleepy farming community in central Maryland, where most families gathered for a home-cooked meal every evening. People prepared almost all the food “from scratch,” and I was expected to pitch in with tasks. The kitchen always seemed to me the most companionable, welcoming room in our house because we not only baked and cooked there but also ate most meals and sat and chatted there.

From at least our middle school years, my nearest playmate, a cousin from the adjacent farm, or my brother and I were allowed to come in and mix up a batch of raisin or oatmeal cookies whenever we liked. Besides the most obvious reward—munching on fragrant, fresh-from-the-oven goodies—we enjoyed the camaraderie and the satisfaction of completing a useful task. (Still valid reasons for baking cookies today!)

The recipes we usually made came from the backs of product boxes, and one was actually the first “saucepan cookie” I ever tried. (The butter was melted, and the remaining ingredients were then stirred in and the cookies dropped from a spoon.) The method was so foolproof and delivered such great results that it's the same one I've used to revamp many of the recipes in this book. I also yearned so much for those oatmeal cookies that when I lost the original recipe I *had* to re-create it.

The kitchen was where we gathered to prep for the major seasonal events. Every Christmas and Easter all the family bakers joined forces to ready our holiday baked goods, partly for the camaraderie and partly because a wider variety of treats could be produced.

We often gave our cookies as gifts—a nice gesture in a community where people were generous in spirit but budgets were tight. In fact, the habit of *making* rather than *buying* all my Christmas presents stuck; decades later I still don't feel ready for the holidays without several batches of homemade cookies on hand.

My mother's Christmas repertoire always included our favorite rolled sugar cookies and, sometimes, her special frosted chocolate drops, too. When I was about nine, she taught me how to ready the sugar cookies, and after that baking and decorating them was my regular contribution.

Since we didn't have a truly notable gingerbread cookie in our family collection, one year I decided to remedy that situation. After trying and rejecting both the molasses-heavy version on the Brer Rabbit bottle and the one in my mother's wooden file box, I climbed on a stool and got down the little stash of cookbooks she kept in the top of the kitchen cupboard.

It's no exaggeration to say that the seemingly unremarkable, tattered collection opened up a whole new world for me, and after that I spent a lot of my free time poring over cookie recipes and trying them out. If there is any truth to the popular notion that 10,000 hours of dedicated effort produces an expert, it could help explain my knack with cookies to this day.

BAKING COOKIES & MAKING MEMORIES TODAY

No matter the setting or lifestyle, homemade cookies, especially easy ones, can fit in and provide an opportunity to relax and unwind. Once I was grown and moved to an urban apartment, I sometimes craved comfort food, and a batch of cookies was a perfect way to recreate the aromas and tastes of my mother's kitchen. The treats satisfied not only my own and my roommate's longings for home, but also those of the college kids who lived next door.

Later, I continued the cookie-making habit with my family and friends out in the 'burbs. Some of the all-day holiday cookie "bake-athons" undertaken with other moms and their kids when our children were young still rank among the favorite times of my child-rearing years.

These days, I mostly bake cookies with my grandchildren. The habit started when my first grandchild, Charlie, was still a toddler and just beginning to talk. If I guided his hand with mine, he was able to "help" cut out cookies and sprinkle on decorations. He quickly got the idea that the goodies had to be taken away and baked, then cooled before we ate them. After that, whenever he arrived at the front door for a visit, he'd immediately say, "Nana bake cookies?"

A few months later, the whole family was astonished when he suddenly said, "Nana, bake *gingerbread* cookies?" No one was aware he even knew that word!

Once his sister, my darling little Lizzie, came along, the three of us began baking together often with Granddaddy or my son joining in the fun. The children have now helped make and decorate all kinds of cookies—drops, slice-and-bakes, thumbprints—in fact, every sort from chichi and fancy to homey and plain. Most recently for St. Patrick's Day, we made shamrock-shaped sandwich cookies filled with a pretty [green tea-ginger buttercream](#)!

If you've somehow missed out on or drifted away from this simple kitchen pleasure, consider remedying that now. Today's cookies are easier and better than ever: Bake; savor; make memories that last a lifetime. Anyone can do it—I hope you will, too.



BEGINNING AT THE BEGINNING

Homemade cookies are one of life's simple pleasures. They don't require a fancy kitchen or special skills, or a big investment of money or time. Many of the recipes in this book are easy enough that the cookies can literally be mixed up, baked, and ready for nibbling in less than 20 minutes—pretty nearly instant gratification! But just in case you're new to cookie baking, they always provide enough detail that you'll know exactly how to proceed.

To get you off to a good start, here are a few fundamentals and tips on ingredients, equipment, and basic techniques like measuring and mixing. (You'll also find useful tips presented right along with every recipe in the book and in each of the chapter introductions.) At the end of this chapter there is a handy Q & A section that covers common troubleshooting issues, baking ahead, and cookie packaging and shipping tips.

INGREDIENTS

Baking Soda and Baking Powder

Remember that while baking soda and baking powder are both leavenings used to lighten the texture of baked goods, they are chemically very different and aren't interchangeable. For one thing, it takes about one-third as much baking soda to do the same leavening job as baking powder, and if you go too heavy on the soda, the cookies will taste oddly bitter.

Baking powder contains both an acid and a base, and the two react and release gas in the presence of moisture and heat. As a result, it's important to store baking powder airtight in a cool spot and to use it promptly. It just naturally loses its oomph over time, so I replace mine yearly.

Baking soda is an alkali that only produces gas bubbles and lightens texture when it's combined with an acid. In a cookie dough, the acid component is most often citrus juice, buttermilk, sour cream, honey, molasses, "American-style" (non-alkalized) cocoa powder (see more information on cocoas under the Chocolate Products section that follows), and, occasionally, cream of tartar. These are required in varying amounts: Only a small quantity of strongly acidic lime juice (pH 1.8 to 2) or lemon juice (pH 2 to 2.5) is required; more of mildly acidic ingredients like honey (pH 3.5 to 5) and coffee (pH 5) are needed. But without *some* acid, the baking soda will not be activated and will lend a chemical aftertaste.

Old-fashioned recipes sometimes call for cream of tartar, an acid powder refined from wine-making, to activate the baking soda. This combo is essentially like a homemade baking powder prepared with 1 part baking soda to 2 parts cream of tartar. It can substitute for baking powder in a pinch.

Baking soda sometimes clumps. Crush lumps between the fingers or with the back of a spoon until completely powdery *before* combining the baking soda with other ingredients.

Butter

I prefer to use unsalted butter and call for it throughout the book. Its taste is noticeably fresher and cleaner than that of salted butter; plus I like to control exactly how much salt I

adding to recipes. Unsalted butter is essential in buttercream filling and frosting recipes; salted butter lends them an overly salty, off taste. Unsalted butter has a shorter refrigerator shelf life than salted butter (salt acts as a preservative), but it will keep extremely well in the freezer. Either thaw it in the refrigerator overnight or on the countertop for several hours, until the consistency specified in the recipe is reached.

A number of recipes skip the traditional creaming of the butter and sugar and instead call for either softening or fully melting the butter and then stirring in the sugar and other ingredients. If directions say to soften the butter, heat it until it is mostly soft and creamy, but still opaque and perhaps with some unmelted lumps; it should not be runny or translucent. Usually the next step is to remove the butter from the heat and continue stirring just until it is creamy and smooth. In other cases, directions call for completely melting the butter; in this case, keep heating until it is runny and translucent.

If you happen to be using frozen butter and really must thaw it in a hurry, place it in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave on *10 percent power* at 30- to 40-second intervals, checking the consistency after each microwaving interval. It's very easy to overdo it and inadvertently melt the butter completely (I know this from sad experience), so proceed slowly and gradually and stop before you think it's thawed quite enough. Be aware that butter melts unevenly in the microwave oven; it may be cold and hard in some spots, warm and runny in others. Even if you need fully melted butter, don't over-warm it, as it can raise the dough temperature and cause cookies to run and flatten too much.

Don't confuse unsalted butter with "sweet cream butter." This indicates only that the butter was churned from sweet cream, not whether salt has been added. Check the label to be sure.

If you can't obtain unsalted butter or prefer to use salted, omit any salt called for in the recipe or reduce it by at least half. Never substitute whipped butter, as it contains more air (and consequently less butter) than the same quantity of stick butter. If you must use margarine, only stick margarine will work; the tub- and soft-style products have a different moisture, fat, and air content and aren't ever suitable substitutes for butter.

Chocolate Products

This book calls for a number of different chocolate products, including unsweetened bittersweet, semisweet, milk chocolate, white chocolate, semisweet chocolate chips (occasionally, pistoles, disc-shaped chips), cocoa nibs (finely chopped cocoa beans), and unsweetened cocoa powder (*not* the presweetened mix for making hot cocoa). These ingredients usually can't be used interchangeably because they contain varying amounts of sugar, cocoa butter, and cacao (the chocolaty solids and natural fat, cocoa butter), all of which greatly affect the texture, taste, appearance, and flavor of cookies.

Remember that "unsweetened" and "bittersweet" chocolate are not the same. Unsweetened is basically just ground cocoa beans, which are very bitter. Bittersweet and semisweet chocolate are both sweetened with sugar, though some bittersweet blends taste fairly sweet and some semisweet chocolates seem fairly dark and bitter. (Milk chocolate, which, as the name suggests, contains milk solids, is both milder and sweeter than the other two.)

By law, chocolate called "bittersweet" must be at least 35 percent cacao, while "semisweet" must be at least 15 percent cacao. But this leaves room for great variation, and in many

cookies the amount of actual chocolate incorporated needs to be precise. In such instances I've given the recommended percentage of cacao when calling for the chocolate in the ingredient list. Problem is, some manufacturers don't post the cacao percentage on the labels. In that case you can get a fairly accurate idea of the percentage by turning to an article relying on [How to Guesstimate the Cacao Percentage](#).

To further complicate matters, two chemically different kinds of unsweetened cocoa powder are on the market: American-style, or non-alkalized (often called "natural" on the label), and Dutch-process (sometimes called Dutched or European), or alkalized. The alkalizing process not only tends to darken cocoa color and lighten its flavor, but most important, Dutching removes the natural acid. As a result, the pH of non-alkalized cocoa is usually 5.5 (slightly acidic), while the pH of Dutch-process is usually 7 (neutral) or 8 (slightly alkaline). This, of course, affects whether baking powder or baking soda should be used in the dough recipe; see the preceding discussion of baking powder and soda for details.

Chocolate is highly sensitive to heat and can burn if not melted as directed. For example, when melting chocolate and butter right on a burner, you *must* make sure to use a heavy saucepan over the *lowest temperature setting* or the chocolate may scorch. When melting chocolate in a microwave oven, melt on the power setting for the time increments specified, stopping and stirring as directed. Most important, be aware that chocolate melted in a microwave oven may be warm and *completely melted* on the *inside*, *before* the outside looks melted at all.

For some valuable insight into *why* chocolate has to be handled so carefully, see the [Chocolate Primer](#) sidebar.

CHOCOLATE PRIMER

Chocolate tastes complex partly because it *is* more complex than most other baking ingredients. Here's some background information on why certain very precise directions in the book need to be followed carefully.

* Chocolate never needs *cooking*; it's ready to use as is or simply melted.

It melts at less than human body temperature—usually at less than 90°F! High heat not only won't speed melting, but it can also cause scorching. Heating longer or at a higher temperature won't thin out a thicker melted chocolate either; its fluidity is determined mostly by its cocoa butter or other fat content. (Since cocoa butter isn't readily available to home cooks, recipes call for incorporating a little flavorless vegetable oil when chocolate must be thinned.)

* Chocolate contains a natural starch that resists mixing smoothly with overly large amounts of liquid or with liquids that aren't pre-warmed. The occasional very specific directions calling for combining chocolate and liquids gradually and at particular temperatures encourage the blending desired. In case you've ever wondered why a ganache or similar mixture thickened rather than thinned out when cream or other liquid was added to the melted chocolate, the starch is the reason. It's also the reason chocolate scorches easily and that chocolate cookies usually need to be baked at 350°F or less.

* The percentage of cacao in the brand of chocolate used has a huge impact on final results in baked goods, so you often need to know what that number is. (See [How to Guesstimate the Cacao Percentage](#) for details on determining the cacao percentage.) Though you might assume that chocolate with the highest percentage of cacao is always the best choice, that's not the case. It just needs to be in proper balance with the other ingredients.

For example, up to a point, an abundance of the natural fat, cocoa butter, is a good thing because it heightens the chocolaty taste and improves mouthfeel. But too much cocoa butter, especially in chocolate morsels or chunks added to doughs, will taste unctuous and cause the dough to run and produce overly flat cookies. (As a result, morsels and chunks specifically designed to be baking stable and used as is in cookies rarely have a cacao percentage higher than around 60 percent.) Likewise, up to a point, a chocolate loaded with the dark, intense flavoring components will boost flavor and color, but too much can yield cookies that are too bitter and harsh tasting.



Dried Fruits

Dried fruits such as raisins, dried sweetened cranberries, dates, currants, figs, apricots, and prunes used in cookies should be plump, moist, and fresh. To make sure they are hydrated enough not to draw moisture from the dough, many recipes call for wetting or soaking them in hot water and then draining and patting them dry before use. This simple step will go far in ensuring that your cookies stay succulent instead of becoming dry and crumbly during storage.

Eggs

All the recipes in *Simply Sensational Cookies* have been tested using large eggs. Since the texture of cookies depends on a precise ratio of sugar, fat, egg, and flour, it is best not to substitute eggs of a different size.

In recipes calling for egg whites to be beaten, the whites must be free of any yolk. Be sure the mixing bowl and beaters are also free of any traces of grease, or the whites may not fluff up properly.

In a couple of the recipes, notably the French macarons, the whites need to be separated and “aged” for at least a few days in the refrigerator. (I was skeptical that this mattered, but when I once tried using “fresh” whites, my macarons didn’t develop the expected little “feet” on the bottom.) I find it convenient to collect whites ahead and freeze them, then transfer them to the refrigerator 6 or 7 days before I make macarons.

You’ll note that recipes calling for beaten whites usually direct you to start on low speed, the

gradually raise the mixer speed to high. Beginning on low produces finer bubbles, which creates a more stable meringue mixture. If you have a heavy-duty stand mixer, which I recommend for macarons and French macarons, beat the egg whites using the whisk-shaped beater.

Flour

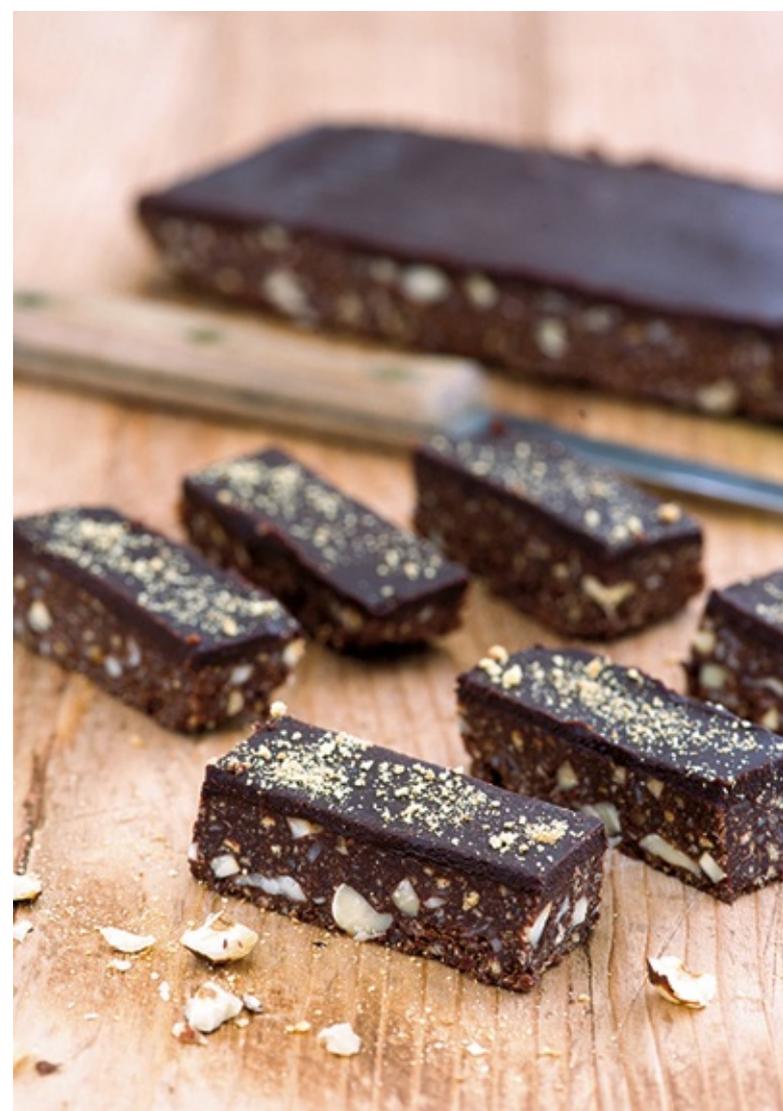
I prefer *unbleached* all-purpose flour and have used it in all the recipes that call for white flour. I also prefer good-quality, brand-name flours, as these are thoroughly ground and pre-sifted and can normally be used without any further sifting or fluffing up. Note that in *Simply Sensational Cookies*, flour is always measured using the *dip-and-sweep* method. This means you should dip the appropriate graduated measure into the sack or canister of flour until the cup is overfull; then sweep, or level off, the mounded flour with a straight-edged spatula or knife. Don't sift or stir the flour in advance. And don't rap the cup or compact the flour by pressing it down.

Nuts

Use only fresh, good-quality nuts. All nuts rapidly become stale and may develop a noticeable rancid flavor, so taste to check freshness before adding them to doughs. If you prefer to buy nuts in more economical large quantities, freeze any that aren't used promptly. Thaw them thoroughly prior to adding them to cookie recipes. If you're in a hurry, use a microwave oven on 10 percent power; stop, stir, and check their temperature every 30 seconds to ensure they don't inadvertently overheat and burn. Stop as soon as they feel barely room temperature to the touch, as they will continue to toast even after being removed from the microwave. Never toss still-frozen nuts into dough, as they can lower the temperature of the dough too much and prevent cookies from spreading properly.

A number of recipes call for toasting nuts, which both brings out their flavor and crisps them. In the case of hazelnuts, toasting also helps loosen the hulls (skins), which taste slightly bitter and should be removed. Instructions for hulling hazelnuts are included in recipes whenever the procedure is required, although toasted and hulled, ready-to-use hazelnuts are becoming more and more common. I find them to be a great time- and labor-saver and well worth the extra cost.

Several recipes in *Simply Sensational Cookies* also call for almond flour—almonds that are ground powder-fine and then usually sifted to remove any coarse bits. (The product can be made at home using a food processor, but this is tedious and it is difficult to obtain the fine flour-like consistency needed.) Supermarkets and health food stores often stock almond flour with the gluten-free baked goods, and many online vendors sell it. Keep it airtight in the refrigerator or freezer so it will stay fresh.



HOW TO GUESSTIMATE THE CACAO PERCENTAGE

The cacao percentage on a package of chocolate simply indicates the percentage of cocoa bean solids and its fat, called “cocoa butter.” Some chocolate bars still don’t include the cacao percentage on the label, and the names of the blends, like “Special Bittersweet” or “Premium Dark,” often don’t shed much light on the percentage either. (Sometimes, in fact, the names seem misleading.)

But you can still use chocolate blends that don’t list the cacao percentage in recipes, because there is an easy way to guesstimate the percentage for all semisweet and bittersweet bars. (The method won’t work for milk chocolates or bars containing nuts.) Simply compare the *grams of sugar* per serving listed on the package with the total grams per serving listed. For example, if a “Semisweet Premium” nutrition panel lists a serving as weighing 40 grams and 20 grams are from sugar, it’s a good bet the cacao percentage is around 50 percent. (Additions like vanilla and lecithin emulsifiers may account for a percent or so, but the rest of the weight has to come from the cacao.)

By the same token, if a “Rich Dark Blend” contains 40 total grams per serving and only 10 grams are from sugar, about three-quarters of the weight is from the chocolate solids and cocoa butter, meaning the cacao percentage is around 75 percent. Incidentally, as you’ll discover if you do the quick ratio check routinely, many of the “semisweet,” “bittersweet,” or “dark” chocolates that fail to note the cacao percentage on the package are in the 45 to 50 percent cacao range.

Spices, Herbs, Extracts, and Flavorings

The recipes in *Simply Sensational Cookies* occasionally call for dried spices and herbs. These need to be stored airtight in a cool, dark spot. Note that dried lavender can now sometimes be obtained in supermarkets along with the other offerings in the McCormick’s Gourmet spice line. Unfortunately, dried spices and herbs won’t keep forever, so I always take a quick sniff to check freshness before using them. Any that smell flat or musty are going to taste equally flat in cookies and should be discarded.

Fresh herbs are now usually stocked in supermarkets year-round. During the growing season, farmers’ markets are an even better, less expensive source, particularly for fresh lavender and tarragon.

When recipes call for vanilla, almond, raspberry, or lemon extract and other such flavorings, use only pure, naturally flavored extracts. Not surprisingly, artificially flavored products often lend an artificial taste to baked goods, so check labels before you buy. Gourmet shops and health food stores seem to stock a wider selection of extracts than supermarkets.

One extremely useful, appealing, and potent extract you may not have encountered before is Fiori di Sicilia, or Flowers of Sicily. It has a complex vanilla-citrus-almond aroma and flavor that can greatly enhance a wide array of butter, sugar, fruit, and nut cookies. It is pricey—often \$6 to \$10 an ounce—but it’s much more potent than the more familiar extracts, so it lasts a lot longer. (Recipes usually don’t call for more than $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon or so.) Gourmet shops sometimes carry this product, and it can be ordered from several online sources. I often purchase it at www.kingarthurflour.com.

Other frequently used flavorings include instant espresso powder or coffee granules (often dissolved in a tiny amount of water), fresh citrus zests, and freeze-dried berries and berry powders. The freeze-dried berry powders are just now coming on the scene and are enormously useful in delivering intense, natural fruit color and flavor. While the powders usually still have to be ordered online, many gourmet food store and health food shops now sell the freeze-dried berries. [Freeze-Dried Berry Flavoring Powders \(Or Decorating Sugar\)](#) gives you the quick, easy instructions for turning the berries into the powders you'll need and some recipes.



Sugar

Recipes always specify whether granulated, powdered, light brown, or dark brown sugar should be used, and these shouldn't be swapped for one another. Besides changing the look and taste, the type of sugar affects cookie texture: Brown and dark brown sugars are heavier, coarser, and contain more moisture than granulated sugar, and this can sometimes totally throw off dough consistency. Brown sugar can even cause meringue cookies to sink or go completely flat.

Avoid brown sugar that has hardened and clumped. I've learned the hard way (no pun intended) that the lumps sometimes remain even after long beating and can end up as gritty bits in the finished cookies. Also, even though some manufacturers suggest it, don't try to soften hardened brown sugar by heating it in the oven. The warm sugar will cause the butter or other fat in the recipe to overheat, soften, and perhaps run during baking. And if you try to wait until the sugar cools before adding it, it will harden again! Though it's a little tedious, you can salvage hardened brown sugar for baking by pounding the block into small chunks with a mallet, grinding them until powdery in a sturdy food processor, then mixing in drops of co

water until it regains the typical slightly moist brown sugar consistency. (Sometimes it's easier to do this than to drop everything and run to the store!)

When powdered sugar is called for, measure it *before* sifting unless the recipe specifies otherwise.

Honey & Molasses

Occasionally, recipes in the book call for honey and molasses. In general, it's best to use clover honey or another mild-flavored honey. The neutral taste mingles better with other ingredients, plus the viscosity is fairly consistent from brand to brand. (It's often the most economical choice, too.)

Because at least one national brand of molasses sells two types—one “dark” and one “light”—several recipes specify one or the other. These terms simply indicate that one has a slightly lighter flavor and color than the other. The “dark” has a slightly more robust taste and deeper color; it should not be confused with blackstrap, which is very dark, thick, and too bitter to be satisfactory in *Simply Sensational* recipes. If your grocery store carries a product simply labeled “molasses,” it will do just fine.

TECHNIQUES

Preheating the Oven

All baking times given in the book are based on results obtained using a thoroughly preheated oven. Allow at least 10 and preferably 15 minutes for preheating. Remember that opening the oven door usually drops the temperature 25° to 50°F (which is why my recipes all call for placing the oven racks in the desired positions at the same time the temperature is set). Also keep in mind that baking times depend partly on the size of the cookies; if your cookies happen to be smaller or larger, or thinner or thicker, than normal, the baking time will necessarily change.

If you bake often, consider investing in an oven thermometer. Then you'll be sure the desired oven temperature has been reached. *A Cook's Illustrated* survey found that the thermostats in home ovens are often off by 50°F or more, dramatically affecting browning, spreading, and baking time.

Assembling and Measuring Ingredients

Cookies are among the simplest baked goods to make, but it's still wise to start by reading through each recipe and ensuring that you have the items needed. Then, take care to measure ingredients accurately: Too much or too little fat, flour, sugar, and other basics, for example, can dramatically affect cookie shape and amount of spreading, crispness, and, of course, taste.

To measure dry ingredients, use the appropriate cup from the graduated set of measuring cups and overfill slightly. Then level off the top with a straight-edged knife or spatula. Don't stir or fluff up dry ingredients such as flour or powdered sugar first, as it will throw off the measurement. See more on measuring [flour](#).

A 1- or 2-cup marked measuring cup with a spout works best for liquid ingredients. Be sure the cup rests on a flat surface and check the measurement from eye level.

- [**Magic Lantern \(Rogue Angel, Book 36\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub**](#)
- [read *Healthcare, Insurance, and You: The Savvy Consumer's Guide* online](#)
- [read Prisoner of Sex](#)
- [read online An American in the Basement: The Betrayal of Captain Scott Speicher and the Cover-up of His Death](#)
- [click Distant Reading online](#)
- [Handbook of Episodic Memory \(Handbook of Behavioral Neuroscience\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)

- <http://deltaphenomics.nl/?library/Magic-Lantern--Rogue-Angel--Book-36-.pdf>
- <http://unpluggedtv.com/lib/Healthcare--Insurance--and-You--The-Savvy-Consumer---s-Guide.pdf>
- <http://metromekanik.com/ebooks/All-Shadows-Fled--Forgotten-Realms---The-Shadow-of-the-Avatar--Book-3-.pdf>
- <http://www.satilik-kopek.com/library/The-Oxford-History-of-the-British-Empire--Volume-5--Historiography.pdf>
- <http://interactmg.com/ebooks/Distant-Reading.pdf>
- <http://unpluggedtv.com/lib/Handbook-of-Episodic-Memory--Handbook-of-Behavioral-Neuroscience-.pdf>