

CHOCOLATE FUDGE COOKIES with TOFFEE and DRIED CHERRIES

makes 40 large cookies

crisp on the outside, soft and chewy in the middle and downright gooey if you get to them still warm. these cookies are great for picnics and crowds and the dough can be frozen until you need it. the contrasting flavours and textures: rich, dark chocolate; sweet, crunchy toffee; and chewy tangy sour cherries, make these totally addictive--and a step up from the average chocolate cookie. make sure the cherries are plump and soft, not dry and hard. i like to make these pretty much fist-sized, but you can make them smaller if you wish. (don't fool yourself; it just means you'll eat more of them.) adjust baking time accordingly if you reduce the size of the cookies.

INGREDIENTS

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup unsweetened dutch-process cocoa powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature
1 cup tightly packed dark brown sugar
3/4 granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1 cup plump, moist, dried sour cherries
8 oz. bitter or semisweet chocolate chopped into chunks about the size of the cherries
1 cup English toffee pieces for baking such as Skor Bits

INSTRUCTIONS

1. preheat the oven to 350 degrees. line two heavy baking sheets, not non-stick, with parchment paper and set aside. sift the flour, cocoa, baking soda and salt together into a bowl and set aside. in a large mixing bowl or the bowl of an electric or stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream together the butter and both sugars until light in colour and fluffy, about 2 minutes. add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition and scraping down the sides of the bowl. beat in the vanilla. stir in the flour-mixture in 3 additions, blending just until the dry ingredients are moistened. i find this part of the job easier with a wooden spoon, rather than a mixer, as i can see better which parts of the batter need more attention without overmixing. stir in the chunky ingredients and mix until they seem evenly distributed. (the dough may be frozen at this point for up to 4 months: wrap the dough securely in plastic wrap, then in a plastic freezer bag. thaw the dough in the refrigerator without removing its wrapping before portioning the cookies and baking.)
2. drop the batter by heaping tablespoons onto the prepared baking sheets and place them in the center of the oven. if you have a large, evenly tempered oven, place the 2 sheets in at once, on two racks positioned close to the middle of the oven. switch the position of the trays once during baking. if your oven is small, or tends to have hot or cold spots, bake one tray at a time so the cookies bake evenly.
3. bake the cookies for 15-18 minutes, or until barely set in the center and just firm around the edges. rotate the sheets once or twice. cool the cookies on the tray for 3-5 minutes, then transfer to wire rack to cool completely before storing. (feel free to eat them at any point.) run the hot tray under cold water to cool it, dry thoroughly and repeat with remaining dough. store the cookies in airtight containers, layered between sheets of parchment or waxed paper for up to 5 days.