

Recipe for Homemade German Gingerbread Hearts

Lebkuchenherzen

You can bake gingerbread hearts at home with this recipe, spelling out exactly what you wish with royal icing decorations. Lebkuchenherzen, or gingerbread hearts, are popular in German outdoor markets such as Christmas markets, Oktoberfest, Kirmes, or Schutzenfest. They usually hang from ribbons and carry cute sayings in the center. Traditionally they are given to friends, sweethearts, or your family to express your feelings.

Ingredients

7 tablespoons butter
3/4 cup honey
5/8 cup sugar
2 1/2 tablespoons cocoa powder
1 tablespoon gingerbread spice mix *(recipe below)
5 cups flour
1 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 egg



Steps to Make It

Note: while there are multiple steps to this recipe, this cookie recipe is broken down into workable categories to help you better plan for preparation and cooking.

Make the Dough

Gather the ingredients.

Bring the butter, honey, sugar, cocoa powder and gingerbread spice mix to a boil in a medium-size saucepan.

Boil for several minutes until the sugar dissolves, then remove from heat and cool slightly.

Sift the flour with the baking powder and salt into a bowl.

Make a depression in the bowl and add the egg, then pour the honey mixture over the flour and mix on low speed until a ball of dough can be formed.

The ball of dough might still be shaggy but will form a smooth dough as it cools down, so do not add extra flour.

Wrap the ball of dough in plastic wrap and put in a safe place at room temperature for 4 to 48 hours. (This dough should rest overnight before baking for best results.)

Bake the Cookies

Heat the oven to 350 F.

Roll out half the dough to 1/2-inch thickness on a lightly floured board.

Use a large, heart-shaped cookie cutter or your own template to cut out large, heart shaped cookies.

If you want to hang these hearts from a ribbon, create one or two holes about 3/4-inch below the rim of the cookie before you bake it.

Repeat with the rest of cookie dough. This dough does not re-roll well, so take care to roll it into the right size the first time.

Place the cookies on a parchment-lined cookie sheet and bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until the cookies are set in the middle and lightly browned on the bottom. Bake the trimmed scraps to use for practice decorating.

Let the cookies cool completely on the baking sheet. They will harden as they cool. Although they are edible, this dough is most often used to make decorative cookies that are hung on the wall or around the recipient's neck and are seldom eaten.

Decorate the Cookies

Use tinted royal icing *(recipe below) to decorate the cookies. You only need about half of the recipe, but you will want to practice decorating with your baked scraps, and you might want to use several colors, so make the whole batch.

Tint some of the icing in a separate bowl using normal food coloring. If the icing is not completely tinted, you can create swirls of lighter and darker colors as you pipe it.

Place the icing in a decorator bag with a leaf tip attached to make the border. Use a writing tip for the words. Find out more about filling and using pastry bags [here](#).

Decorate as you like. It is traditional to write cute sayings in the center and give the cookies to people you like.

Tips

These cookies will last for months in a tin or well-wrapped and stored at room temperature.

While they can be eaten, they are usually made for decorative purposes.

Useful German and English Phrases

You can use the most popular German phrases for these cookies, or their English translations:

"Ich liebe Dich" (I love you)

"Ich mag Dich" (I like you)

"Spatzl" (Little sparrow)

"Weil i Di mog" (Because I like you—in Munich dialect)

"Für mein Mäd!" (For my girl)

"Ich hab Dich (sooo) lieb" (I like you sooo much)

"Zum Muttertag" (For mother's day)

"Drücke mich" (Hug me)

"Markus + Claudia" (or Mike + Jen, etc.)

"Meiner Kuschelmaus" (My snuggle-mouse)

"No. 1 Lehrer" (No. 1 teacher)

"#1 Mutti" (No. 1 mother)

Homemade Gingerbread Spice Mix

Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp allspice ground
- 2 Tbsp cinnamon ground
- 2 Tbsp ginger ground
- 1 Tbsp cloves ground
- 1 Tbsp nutmeg ground
- pinch black pepper ground
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Instructions

1. Combine all ingredients in a small bowl.
2. Store in an airtight container.

Royal Icing Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 pound confectioners' sugar (sifted, more as needed)
- 1/2 cup/3 large pasteurized egg whites (room temperature)
- 1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
- Steps to Make It
- Gather the ingredients.

Instructions

In a large bowl, combine the confectioners' sugar, pasteurized egg whites, and cream of tartar. Scrape down the sides of the bowl.

Turn the mixer to high and beat until the mixture is thick, very white, and will hold a peak. This should take at least 7 to 10 minutes. If the icing is still too soupy, add more confectioners' sugar a little at a time. Don't add too much, or the icing will be dry and hard to work with.

When finished, cover with plastic wrap, making sure it touches the royal icing so a crust doesn't form. Royal icing dries out quickly, so make sure it is covered all the time. Otherwise, lumps will form in the icing and they will never pass through an icing tip.

When ready to use, transfer to a piping bag and decorate. Enjoy!

Raw Egg Warning

Consuming raw and lightly-cooked eggs poses a risk for food-borne illness.

Tips

You can tint the icing by using a small amount of paste food color (don't use liquid food color because it will dilute the icing and make it soupy). For 1/4 cup tinted icing, dip the tip of a toothpick into the desired color, then into the icing and whip. Repeat until the desired color is achieved. For strong colors, such as red, royal blue, and dark purple, use 1/8 teaspoon color to 1/4 cup icing.

Royal icing can be used immediately, or stored with plastic wrap pressed against the top and completely sealed in the fridge for a few days.