There’s a reason that the word *cookies* follows *Christmas* with such inevitability.

Teamed up with hot cider or eggnog or coffee, cookies are the number-one choice for holiday munching.

When making cookies, follow directions precisely and don’t overbake. Let pans cool before placing more unbaked cookies on them.

ALMOND MADELEINES

1 (7-ounce) box Odense Almond Paste

1 stick, butter, melted

2/3 cup sugar

3 eggs, room temperature

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 cup flour

1/4 teaspoon baking powder

1/8 teaspoon salt

Powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 375°F. Grease and flour a madeleine pan.

Using an electric mixer, beat almond paste, butter and sugar until smooth.

Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Beat on high for 5 minutes or until mixture is thick and pale colored. Beat in vanilla.

Sift flour, baking powder and salt together. Pour flour mixture into almond mixture a third at a time, folding gently until incorporated.

Spoon one tablespoon batter into each mold (a cookie scoop that holds 1 tablespoon of batter makes quick work of this step). Bake 11-13 minutes until light golden and top springs back when pressed.

Cool pan on wire rack for a few minutes and gently unmold. Cool cookies on wire rack and dust with powdered sugar. Repeat until all batter has been used. Yields about 3 dozen cookies.

GINGERBREAD COOKIES

3 cups all-purpose flour

1-1/2 teaspoons baking powder

3/4 teaspoon baking soda

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon ground ginger

1-3/4 teaspoons cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

6 tablespoons butter

3/4 cup dark brown sugar

1 large egg

1/2 cup molasses

2 teaspoons vanilla

1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest (optional)

In a small bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon and cloves until well blended.

In a large mixer bowl, beat butter, brown sugar and egg on medium speed until well blended. Add molasses, vanilla and lemon zest, and continue to mix until well blended.

Gradually stir in dry ingredients until blended and smooth.

Divide dough in half and wrap each half in plastic and let stand at room temperature for at least 2 hours or up to 8 hours.

Preheat oven to 375°F. Grease or line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

Place 1 portion of the dough on a lightly floured surface. Sprinkle flour over dough and rolling pin and roll dough to a scant 1/4-inch thick. Use additional flour to avoid sticking.

Cut out cookies with desired cutter (the gingerbread man is the favorite, of course).

Space cookies 1-1/2-inches apart and bake 1 sheet at a time for 7-10 minutes (the lower time will give you softer cookies).

Remove cookie sheet from oven and allow cookies to stand until they are firm enough to move to a wire rack. After cookies are cool, you may decorate them or just brush them with a powdered-sugar glaze if you are in a hurry, but they look wonderful decorated with Royal icing. Yields 2 dozen.

DANISH CHRISTMAS COOKIES

1 cup plain flour

1/2 cup (just under) butter

1/2 cup superfine sugar

1 large egg, separated

1-3/4 teaspoons cinnamon or ground cardamom

Pinch of salt

Blanched almonds to decorate

Pre-heat oven to 300°F.

Put aside the egg white, 1 ounce of the sugar, and 1 teaspoon of cinnamon or cardamom for glazing.

Rub the butter into the flour until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add the yolk of the egg, the sugar, salt and spice. Mix the dough with a wooden spoon and then knead until smooth.

Roll the dough out on a floured surface until 1/4 inch thick. Cut out cookie shapes with your favorite cookie cutter. Mix the egg white with 1 level tablespoon of sugar and 1 teaspoon of spice and brush over the cookies. Put one blanched almond in the centre of each cookie.

Bake until light brown.

CHEWY MOLASSES SUGAR COOKIES

1-1/2 cups shortening

2 cups white sugar

1/2 cup molasses

2 eggs

4 cups all-purpose flour

4 teaspoons baking soda

2 teaspoons cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground cloves

1 teaspoon ground ginger

1 teaspoon salt

Melt the shortening in a large pan on the stove, and cool.

Add sugar, eggs and molasses; beat well.

In a separate bowl, sift dry ingredients together and add to the pan. Mix well and chill 3 hours or overnight.

Form into walnut-size balls. Roll in granulated sugar. Place on greased cookie sheet about 2 inches apart.

Bake at 375°F for 8-10 minutes. Makes 6 dozen cookies.

Note: If cookies lose their softness, an easy way to restore it is to place one slice of fresh bread in the container with the cookies for a couple of hours or overnight and they will be soft again!

OATMEAL SHORTBREAD

1 cup butter

3/4 cup brown sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

2 cups flour

1 cup oatmeal, toasted (at 350°F for 5 to 7 minutes, then cooled and pulverized)

Cream butter and sugar until fluffy; add vanilla; work in flour and oatmeal a bit at a time with fingers or in a food processor. Chill 20 minutes. Roll out to 1/4-inch thickness. Prick top with a fork.

Bake at 325°F for 15 to 20 minutes. Dust top with powdered sugar if desired. Yields about 3 dozen cookies.