Pumpkin Patch Shortbread Cookies

Makes: 12 cookies with 4" cutter
Prep Time: 45 minutes Cook Time: 30 minutes
Total Time: 1 hour & 15 minutes plus chill time 1 hour

Ingredients

For the Cookies:

- 1 cup (16 tbsp) salted butter, very soft but not melted
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 & 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup cornstarch

For the Orange Glaze:

- 2 cups powdered sugar
- 4 tbsp half-and-half or milk, plus more as needed
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Orange food coloring

For Decorating:

- Green nonpareils or small green sprinkles

Instructions

Prepare the Dough:

Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. In a medium bowl, stir the softened butter and vanilla together with a wooden spoon or sturdy spatula until smooth. Add the powdered sugar and mix until fluffy and well combined.

Sprinkle the flour and cornstarch over the butter mixture. Stir until the flour is incorporated

and a shaggy dough forms. Turn the dough onto a well-floured surface and knead gently a few times until fairly smooth. Gather into a ball, then flatten into a disk.

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to about 3/8-inch thick. Use a pumpkin-shaped cookie cutter to cut out the cookies, transferring them to the prepared baking sheets. Gather and reroll the scraps as needed. Refrigerate the cutout cookies for at least 1 hour, or up to 24 hours. Chilling helps the cookies hold their shape during baking.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Bake the chilled cookies for 12–16 minutes, rotating the pans halfway through if needed, until the edges are just beginning to turn light golden. Let the cookies cool completely before decorating.

Make the Glaze:

In a medium bowl, whisk together the powdered sugar, half-and-half, and vanilla until smooth. The glaze should be thick enough to coat the cookies but still pourable. Add a little more milk if needed. Stir in orange food coloring a few drops at a time until you reach your desired pumpkin shade.

Glaze the Cookies:

Transfer the glaze to a shallow bowl. Holding a cookie by its edges, dip the top surface into the glaze, making sure the entire surface is coated. Lift it out and allow the excess glaze to drip back into the bowl. Once the dripping slows, quickly flip the cookie right side up and give it a gentle jiggle so the glaze settles into an even layer.

While the glaze is still wet, use a small spoon to sprinkle green nonpareils or sprinkles onto each cookie to create a stem and little leaves. Place the cookies on a cooling rack set over a baking sheet to catch any stray sprinkles. Allow the glaze to dry completely before stacking or packaging the cookies. This may take several hours or overnight.

Chef's Notes:

- Soft butter is essential: The butter should be very soft but not melted. Since this dough is mixed by hand, properly softened butter makes it much easier to combine everything smoothly.
- Adjust the dough if needed: Butter brands vary in moisture content. If the dough feels too soft or sticky to roll, knead in a little extra flour.
- Chill before baking: Don't skip the chilling step. It helps the cookies maintain their pumpkin shape in the oven. If you're short on time, you can chill them in the freezer for about 30 minutes instead.

- Smooth glaze: If bubbles appear in the glaze, stir slowly to help them disappear. If a bubble forms on a cookie, gently pop it before the glaze sets.
- Flavor variations: You can replace the vanilla in the glaze with almond, orange, lemon, or coconut extract. Start with a small amount and adjust to taste.
- Make ahead: The cookies can be baked ahead and decorated when convenient. Once the glaze is completely dry, store them in an airtight container. They can also be frozen between layers of parchment once the glaze has dried.
- Yield: About 15 large cookies or 24 smaller cookies, depending on the size of your pumpkin cutter.