

# Mary's Sugar Cookies

*From Maureen O'Neal of Raleigh.*

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon cream of tartar

1 cup salted butter, slightly softened

3 1/2 cups powdered sugar, divided

1 egg

1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon almond extract, divided

4 teaspoons milk

Sprinkles, colored sugar, cinnamon hot candies, food coloring, etc.

Combine flour, baking soda and cream of tartar in medium bowl and set aside.

Cream butter and 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar together until light and fluffy. Add egg and 1 tablespoon almond extract. Gradually add flour until well combined. Divide dough into three equal pieces, wrap with plastic wrap and chill for 2 to 3 hours.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Lightly flour counter and rolling pin and roll dough into 1/4-inch thickness and cut into desired shapes. Bake for 7 to 8 minutes until lightly brown. Remove from oven, place cookies on baking racks to cool.

Combine remaining 2 cups powdered sugar, 1 teaspoon almond extract and milk to make frosting. Stir until smooth, adding more milk if necessary to reach desired consistency. You can divide frosting and add a few drops of food coloring, if desired.

Decorate cookies with frosting, sprinkles, colored sugar and candies.

*Yield: about 30-36 cookies.*

# Red Stag Bourbon Balls

*This recipe is a two-day process. From Christine Chase of Raleigh.*

1 cup chopped pecans

1/2 cup Jim Beam Red Stag Black Cherry Bourbon

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 pound plus 1/3 cup powdered sugar, divided

3/8 bar of paraffin wax, shredded

3/4 cup milk chocolate chips

3/4 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

50 mini-cupcake paper liners

On the first day, place chopped pecans and bourbon in a glass bowl in the refrigerator for at least 12 hours. Pecans should be fully submerged.

On the second day, cream butter in a large metal or glass mixing bowl. Slowly add 1 pound powdered sugar. Add pecans until well blended. Place filling in refrigerator for an hour.

Line a rimmed baking sheet with wax paper. Fill a large shallow bowl with ice water. Take out filling and place bowl on top of ice water to keep cold while you roll filling into balls.

Put remaining 1/3 cup powdered sugar in a small mound on a large plate. Use a teaspoon to scoop out some of the filling and drop it into the powdered sugar. Coat fingers in the sugar and then roll filling into a ball and coat it with sugar. Place ball on waxed paper and repeat until done. Place the filled cookie sheet in refrigerator to chill balls for about 30 minutes.

Line a second rimmed baking sheet with wax paper. Fill the bottom of a double boiler or a small saucepan with 1 1/2 inches of water and set over low heat on the stove. Place paraffin and chocolate chips in top of double boiler or in a metal or glass bowl that can sit on top of the saucepan without touching the water. Stir frequently until paraffin and chocolate are melted.

Remove balls from refrigerator. Use a teaspoon to dip each ball in the chocolate, covering completely with chocolate, and allow excess to drip off the spoon. Place each ball on the wax paper. Repeat until done. Cool in refrigerator for 15 minutes.

Place balls in cupcake liners and store in sealed plastic containers or decorative tins in the refrigerator.

*Yield: about 50 bourbon balls.*

# Gingerbread Rugelach with Cranberry Jam

*From Brittany Fishman Pais of Raleigh. The jam can be made up to three days ahead. The dough also can be made ahead and frozen.*

For the jam:	1/4 cup brown sugar
1 (12-ounce) bag fresh cranberries	4 teaspoons ginger
1 1/4 cups sugar	3 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 cup apple cider	1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
Juice of 1 lemon	1/4 teaspoon cloves
3/4 cup water, divided	1/4 teaspoon allspice
1 tablespoon cornstarch	1 1/4 cups unsalted butter
For the dough:	3 egg yolks
3 cups all-purpose flour	1 cup sour cream
1/2 teaspoon salt	Egg wash (1 egg plus 1 tablespoon water)

Cinnamon and white sugar for topping

**Make the jam:** Combine cranberries, sugar, apple cider and lemon juice in a medium saucepan. Mix 1 tablespoon water with cornstarch to create a slurry. Add slurry and remaining water to the saucepan and bring mixture to a boil over medium heat. Stir occasionally. After the mixture begins to boil, reduce heat to low and simmer for about 25 minutes. Stir and mash cranberries with side of spoon as they cook. Once mixture has thickened slightly, take saucepan off the heat. The jam will thicken as it cools. Chill until ready to use.

**Make the dough:** Combine flour, salt, sugar, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and allspice in a large bowl. Slice butter into 1 inch slices and cut butter into dry ingredients until crumbly. Make a well in the center and stir in egg yolks and sour cream until a dough comes together.

Divide dough into two portions. Wrap each portion in plastic wrap and chill for an hour in the refrigerator. (Dough can be frozen at this point.)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line baking sheets with parchment paper.

Roll one portion of dough into a 12-inch circle. Spread jam over the entire circle in a thin layer. Cut dough into 12 to 14 wedges with a pizza slicer. Roll each portion, starting from the outer edge, into small crescents. Place on baking sheet. Brush each with egg wash and sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar. Repeat with remaining dough.

Bake until golden, about 25 to 35 minutes. Cool on baking sheet and transfer to a wire rack to cool.

*Yield: about 24 to 28 cookies.*