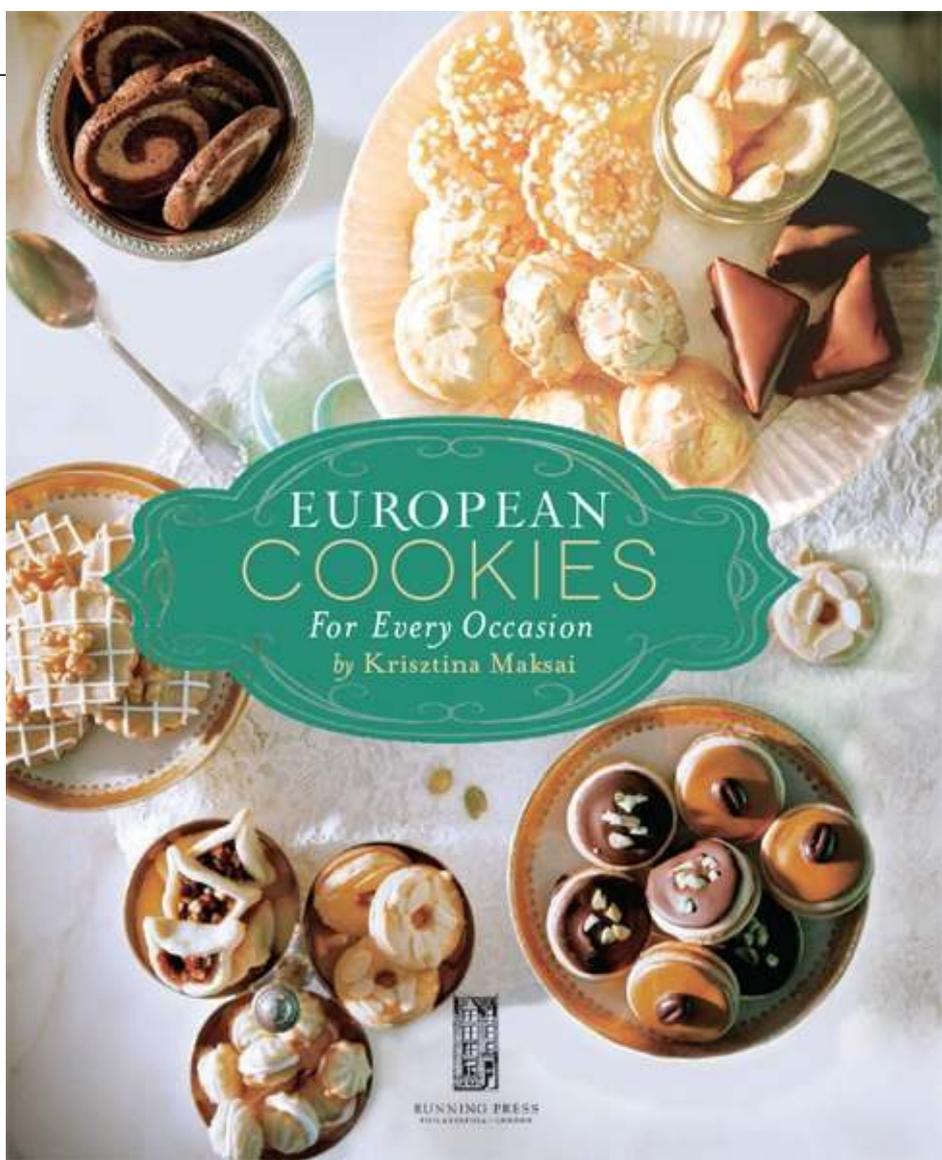


EUROPEAN  
COOKIES  
*For Every Occasion*

KRISZTINA MAKSAI



# EUROPEAN COOKIES

*For Every Occasion*

by Krisztina Maksai



RUNNING PRESS  
4001 & 4001A - LONDON

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Photography © Doug McClintock: cover, pages 1, 26, 55, 60, 73, 89, 92, 97, 102, 110, 115, 118, 123, 134, 142, 165, 176, 184

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2013937227

E-book ISBN 978-0-7624-5070-1

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Digit on the right indicates the number of this printing

Edited by Geoffrey Stone  
Typography: Allura, Berkeley Book, and Novcento

Running Press Book Publishers  
2300 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19103-4371

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*To you,  
the dear reader,  
whoever you might be,  
I wrote this for you.*



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## Introduction

**E**ver since I could remember, I have had a sweet tooth. Although I was born in Romania, my family moved to Germany when I was three years old. My first memories of sweets are of street fairs and typical small-town baking sales in Germany. The cakes and cookies mesmerized me. I felt trapped in a spell of their sugarcoated sweetness. We moved often when I was growing up, and living in different countries broadened my horizons.

When I was eleven, I baked my first cake for Easter. It was an apricot-mascarpone German mole cake. From that point on, I fell in love with creating delicious cakes and desserts. Any opportunity I have to bake, I take it. If someone's birthday or a holiday is coming up, the first thing I do is surround myself with books and magazines on baking. I spend hours looking at the pictures and reading recipes to get ideas for creating the best desserts for the occasion.

By the time I turned seven, my family had moved to Hungary, exposing me to another interesting culture. All the countries where I lived and visited had one thing in common: cookies for Christmas. While their form and tastes vary from country to country, they all are delicious and beautiful treats. The possibilities seem endless: filled or topped, sprinkled or glazed, decorated with chocolate or with fruit. That is why my biggest passion is cookies. One Christmas season several years ago, I stepped into the world of delicious small pastries of different shapes and fillings and the most incredible flavors. A few cookie recipes caught my eye, so I decided to bake them. So fragile and small, they were cookies you could eat in just one bite. While that baking experience was not an immediate success, I had so much fun doing it. The decorations were so precise, I was essentially painting each cookie, and my family reacted as though I had offered them pieces of edible art.

Since then, I have baked many different kinds of cookies for Christmas. Now, when my name comes up among family members or close friends, it always makes them think of the cookies and cakes that I bake. After a while each Christmas I would try to break my own record. How many different kinds of cookies could I bake? Two years ago, I broke my personal record by baking twenty-seven different types of cookies. I worked on the cookies for two or three weeks. I baked at night as a relaxing way to pass the time, but the only downside was all the dirty dishes! Fortunately, I have an incredibly caring and sweet grandmother. She would chase me away from the sink filled with mountains of unwashed dishes, saying, "Leave it up to me, I am a professional!" I gave her a smooch on the cheek and went happily back to making cookies.

I realized very quickly that baking is like learning how to drive or learning a new language. With practice, you will improve. I believe that anybody can do it with an accurate recipe, precise instructions, and a few baking tips. Of course, in the beginning the result may not be perfect, but don't give up. Everybody made mistakes at the beginning, even the professional confectioners. It will get easier. You will learn from your mistakes, and eventually you will become confident enough to alter recipes to your own tastes.

The more recipes you try, the more confidence you will have to attempt difficult or "fancy" cookies and desserts. Soon your loved ones will call you "the master of baking." After all, if you were able to learn how to read or write, baking will be a piece of cake!

I hope my book will erase the mysteries of baking and encourage you to replicate the recipes for yourself. And more importantly, I hope that you will soon develop your own little edible masterpiece. The only things you need are your will, determination, and time!

I wish you all the delights and happiness I have found in baking!

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# **Baking Tools**

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You don't need many baking tools to make these cookies, but with the right ones, achieving the best results will be much easier. However, if you don't have all the tools, don't worry; you can always look for substitutes in your kitchen. Improvisation in cooking is everything.

- 1. MIXING BOWLS** (plastic, ceramic, or glass) in a variety of sizes.
- 2. SPOONS AND FORKS** to stir, fill, or decorate.
- 3. PASTRY SPATULAS** to remove cookies from the pan without breaking them. If you don't have one, a flat-bladed flexible knife or a cheese cutter is a good substitute.
- 4. FLOUR SIFTER** to decorate the finished cookies evenly with confectioners' sugar.
- 5. COOLING RACK** to allow air to circulate around the cookies so they will cool quickly and evenly.
- 6. ELECTRIC MIXER** with two types of beaters: regular beaters to mix, beat, and whip, and dough hooks to knead dough.
- 7. PARCHMENT PAPER** to prevent cookies from sticking to the pan.
- 8. CUTTING BOARDS** (wooden or plastic) to roll out dough and cutting dough.
- 9. TOOTHPICKS** to use for decorating
- 10. ROLLING PIN** (wooden or stone) to roll out cookie dough.
- 11. ELECTRIC SCALE** to measure ingredients. These recipes will be more successful if you use a scale instead of measuring cups.
- 12. BAKING SHEETS** or cookie pans to bake the cookies.
- 13. COOKIE CUTTERS** to cut out different shapes. The basic cutters you will need are round, star, and heart shaped. But the more shapes you have, the more distinctive your cookies will be.
- 14. PASTRY BRUSHES** to brush glazes and egg washes on cookies. Brushes with silicone bristles are good for large surfaces, and natural bristle brushes are the best for fragile dough and more precise work.
- 15. VARIOUS PLASTIC SPATULAS** to remove cookies, sticky dough from bowls, etc.



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## Dark Chocolate

ONCE WHEN I WAS IN VENICE, ITALY, I DISCOVERED A HIDDEN CAFE WHERE I WAS SERVED an amazing espresso. The waiter gave me the house specialty along with my coffee. It was a small square of very dark (or bittersweet) chocolate, and I was confused, because I expected a little cookie or biscuit. He explained to me that espresso and bittersweet chocolate harmonize extremely well. I took a bite of the dark chocolate. I let it melt a bit in my mouth, and then I took a sip of the coffee. I was not sure if I was doing it the right way, but after a few seconds, it felt like a small explosion of flavors in my mouth.

I bought a few of the chocolate squares and ate them while strolling through Venice's lovely alleys. They were delicious. The texture of the chocolate was surprisingly creamy after it started to melt, and the tiny touch of sweetness was a perfect balance to the bitterness. I actually felt for the first time in my life, that I could appreciate real chocolate. From that point on, I have used only semisweet or bittersweet chocolate for all of my cookies, cakes, and desserts.

Bittersweet chocolate generally contains more chocolate liquor and less sugar than semisweet chocolate does. However, the percentage of cocoa in bittersweet chocolate may vary depending on the brand, so always read the ingredients. High quality chocolate should have at least 35 percent cacao solids or butter from cocoa beans. Some semisweet chocolate can contain up to 35 percent cocoa and can be used interchangeably with bittersweet. The higher the percentage of cocoa, the less sweet the chocolate will be, which is relevant in baking and decorating. Even a 65 percent chocolate tastes delicious to me. But once, I tasted a chocolate bar that was 99 percent cocoa, and it was so bitter that I was not able to eat it—not even a tiny sliver. Experiment with different percentages of cocoa to learn your cocoa limit.

Milk chocolate contains less cocoa solids and much more sugar than both semisweet and bittersweet chocolate. The sweet taste of this type of chocolate tends to suppress other flavors and can make cookies taste plain and overly sweet.

Dark chocolate, which includes both semisweet and bittersweet chocolates, harmonizes well with all kinds of ingredients and allows other flavors to develop. If you heat and prepare dark chocolate correctly, you can add a shiny, smooth topping on all your cakes and cookies.

White chocolate is made from sugar, milk, and cocoa butter or vegetable oil and has no cocoa solids. In my opinion, it is not a real chocolate. It is very sweet, which is why I rarely use it in doughs or fillings, but it is great for decoration. The white color makes a lovely contrast against dark chocolate.

## How to Melt Chocolate

THERE ARE MANY FANCY WAYS TO MELT CHOCOLATE, BUT HERE ARE THE simplest and most effective methods that I use when I bake.

## MICROWAVE

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Microwaving is the quickest way to melt semisweet chocolate, but many people have difficulty doing it. Here are some simple tricks:

- Chop the chocolate into small bits (or use chocolate chips) and put them into a small microwave-safe dish.
- Choose a mid-level heat and put the chocolate in for about 10 seconds. The trick is to not let the chocolate get too hot. The temperature of the chocolate shouldn't get over 122°F (50°C). If the temperature gets too hot, the chocolate will burn and it will be unusable. Milk chocolate can burn at 113°F (45°C) and dark chocolate can be heated to 140°F (60°C) before it burns.
- Take the chocolate out of the microwave and stir it with a spoon. If it is not completely melted after stirring, it will need more time in the microwave.
- Put it in for another 10 seconds. Take the chocolate out and check by stirring again with a spoon. You want the consistency to be slightly creamy, but not totally melted.
- If there are little chunks in the chocolate, stir until they are all melted. At this point don't put the chocolate back in the microwave as it could burn.

## HOT WATER (BAIN MARIE)

I RARELY USE THIS TECHNIQUE BECAUSE YOU RISK GETTING STEAM OR humidity into the chocolate, which makes it unusable for decorating. If you choose to use this method and steam gets into your chocolate, don't throw it away. It may be used for cookie fillings, dough, or sauces.

- Put a pot on the stovetop and fill it  $\frac{3}{4}$  full with water. Using a candy thermometer, check to make sure that the water does not boil, but reaches a temperature of 98°F (37°C).
- Chop the chocolate into small bits (or use chocolate chips) and put them in a smaller pot. Then carefully set the smaller pot in the larger pot filled with the hot water. Alternatively, you may use a double boiler if you have one. The water temperature will melt the chocolate very gently, which lowers the risk of it burning.
- Stir the chocolate slowly, until it is almost melted. Then cool the chocolate as mentioned below.

## *How to Temper Chocolate*

DARK CHOCOLATE HAS TO REACH A TEMPERATURE OF 90°F (32°C) BEFORE it can be used to decorate the cookies. By using either one of these methods mentioned above, you will get the perfect result. If the chocolate is not properly cooled, it will be too fluid and will not shine. The best way to cool or temper your chocolate is by stirring it continuously while adding a few chocolate chips or grated chocolate to the melted chocolate. Keep stirring until the chips are melted into the chocolate and it reaches the correct temperature, about 15 minutes. An alternate method is to leave the chocolate at room temperature and stir it from time to time until it is cool. However, the results are not as consistent with this method.

PAPER CONES OR PIPING BAGS ARE SIMPLE BUT USEFUL TOOLS FOR SMALL cookie decorations. The cones may be used for tiny decorations that need to be very precise and accurate, and they are also great for larger jobs like filling cookies or cakes.

One of my favorite things about paper cones is that you can control the size of their tips by snipping more or less off of the ends. They are easy to make, but it might take you a few tries to make the perfect cone.

### HOW TO MAKE A PAPER CONE:

1. Cut an 8-inch triangle out of parchment paper (or buy the pre-cut triangles).
2. Use your right hand to roll one of the points of the triangle to the center of the triangle, and with your left hand roll the bottom point up to complete the cone. The three points should overlap each other.
3. Adjust the cone, so that the point is completely closed and sharp.
4. Fold down the loose edges of the open end so it will not unroll.
5. Fill the cone with filling or icing. Fold the open ends several times, so that they are tightly closed.
6. Cut a small piece off of the tip of the cone. Hold the cone between your thumb and your other fingers. If the hole does not let the filling ease out, you can cut the tip again about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch or until it allows the filling to be piped onto the cookies.



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## Vanilla Sugar

*Vanilla sugar is a common ingredient of pastry recipes in European countries such as Germany, Finland, Austria, France, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia. It can be difficult to obtain this specific sugar outside of Europe, but in America it can be found in import shops and grocery stores that cater to European populations. If you cannot find it locally, a replacement for vanilla sugar is pure vanilla extract. One teaspoon of vanilla extract equals two teaspoons of vanilla sugar, but I prefer to use vanilla sugar in my cooking for a more natural flavor.*

*Vanilla sugar is easy to make, and has no added artificial coloring or flavor. Vanilla beans might not be cheap, but they will pay off in flavor. This recipe yields a vanilla sugar that will keep for a long time and impart the scent and intense flavor of real vanilla in your cookies, cakes, coffee, or other foods or drinks. To intensify the flavor of this vanilla sugar, add a second vanilla bean.*

### MAKES 2 CUPS

1 WHOLE VANILLA BEAN  
2 CUPS (400 GRAMS) GRANULATED SUGAR

1. Put the sugar in a one-quart glass storage container with a tight lid. Using a sharp knife, slice the vanilla bean lengthwise. With the side of the knife, scrape the insides of the bean into the container with the sugar. Cut the bean into two or three pieces and push them deep into the sugar with your fingers.
2. Seal the lid tightly and shake the jar until the vanilla flakes are visible and spread evenly through the sugar. Put the container on a dark shelf, and shake the jar vigorously every three days for two weeks. After two weeks the vanilla sugar is ready to be used.

**BAKING TIP:** Do not remove the beans, as they will continue to flavor the sugar. Vanilla sugar is an original gift idea for the baking enthusiasts in your life.

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## Gingerbread Spice Mixture

*Gingerbread—a confection made with honey or molasses and a specific mix of spices—is an especially popular snack in England, Scandinavia, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Croatia, and other European countries. It occurs in many different shapes and textures depending on the country in which it is made. The English version of gingerbread is denser, moister, and more like a sponge cake with raisins, nuts, apples, and other ingredients. The Middle and Eastern European gingerbread is rather flat, semisoft biscuit cut into different shapes and served as a specialty at Christmas. Gingerbread houses are also very popular all over Europe. The dough and spices are similar to traditional gingerbread, but the density of the dough for the houses is much harder in order to make the construction more stable. The houses are decorated with brightly colored candies and nuts and are generally used only for decoration, though they are edible.*

*This recipe for Gingerbread Spice is not only good for gingerbread or ginger biscuits, but also for adding to waffle batter, muffins, cookies, or even ice cream. For a Christmassy morning brew, add one teaspoon of the mixture to ground coffee before brewing. The combination of the coffee and spice creates an amazingly rich flavor. If you can't find one of the spices, feel free to leave it out. As long as you have cinnamon, cloves, and anise the mixture will be close enough in flavor to the original recipe.*

### MAKES ABOUT $\frac{3}{4}$ CUP

$\frac{1}{2}$  CUP GROUND CINNAMON  
1 TABLESPOON GROUND GINGER  
1 TABLESPOON GROUND ALLSPICE  
1 TEASPOON GROUND NUTMEG  
1 TEASPOON GROUND CLOVES  
1 TEASPOON GROUND ANISE SEED

1. Combine all of the above ingredients in a bowl and stir carefully with a long-handled spoon.
2. Scoop the mixture into a glass or ceramic jar with a tight-fitting lid. Store the mixture in the jar on a dark shelf for six months or more.

# Quick and Easy Cookies

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BLUEBERRY SURPRISE  
CHOCOLATE CRESCENTS  
FAUX PRALINES  
JAMMED CUSHIONS  
LEMON BARS  
ORANGE MEDALLIONS  
POPPY SEED STARS  
RED DOTS  
SNOW SQUARES  
SPRINKLED FLOWERS



---

# Blueberry Surprise

*Blueberries are one of my favorite berries, and that is the reason I created this recipe. I encourage cooks to use organic blueberries not only because they taste great, but also because they contain dietary fibers, vitamin C, vitamin A, calcium, magnesium, and resveratrol. Resveratrol is a natural compound found in many foods such as grapes and peanuts, and it is thought to protect against cancer and cardiovascular disease by acting as an antioxidant, anti-mutagen, and anti-inflammatory. Some studies have revealed that a blueberry-enriched diet can help people to lose weight and decrease belly fat, but I don't think these cookies have weight-reducing attributes.*

## MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN COOKIES

### COOKIE DOUGH

2 CUPS (250 GRAMS) ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR  
2/3 CUP (150 GRAMS) UNSALTED BUTTER, AT ROOM TEMPERATURE  
2/3 CUP (70 GRAMS) CONFECTIONERS' SUGAR  
2 MEDIUM EGG YOLKS  
GRATED ZEST OF 1 LEMON

### FILLING

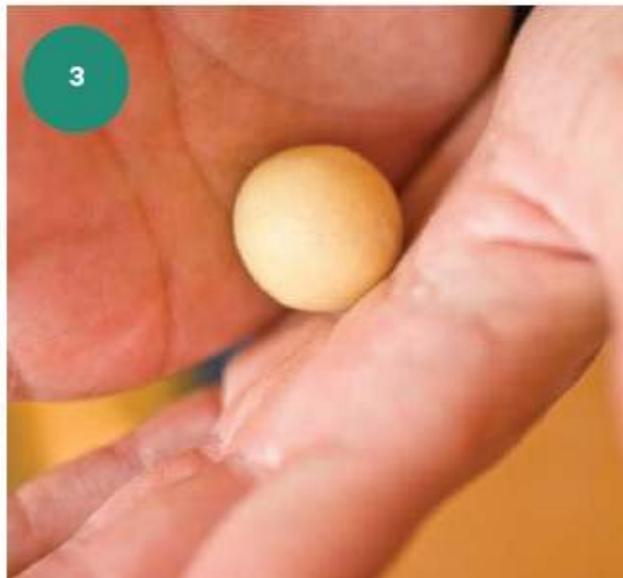
1/2 CUP (70 GRAMS) FROZEN BLUEBERRIES

### DECORATION

1/3 CUP (60 GRAMS) SEMISWEET CHOCOLATE CHIPS

- 1. FOR THE COOKIE DOUGH:** Combine the dough ingredients in a bowl and, using the dough hook attachment of an electric mixer, knead until the dough is smooth, 3 to 5 minutes. Form the dough into a small loaf. Wrap the loaf in plastic wrap and let it rest in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes.
  - 2.** Preheat the oven to 350°F (180 °C).
  - 3.** Lightly flour a working surface and form the cookie dough into a log with a diameter of about 1/2 inch (1 cm). With a knife, cut the dough into 1/2-inch (1 cm) pieces and then form little balls out of each piece.
  - 4. FOR THE FILLING:** Flatten each of the balls and place one frozen blueberry in the middle. Then fold the dough over the fruit and form it again into a ball. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, place the cookies on the sheet about 1 inch (2.5 cm) apart, and bake them for 15 minutes or until lightly golden. Carefully transfer the cookies to a cooling rack using a pastry spatula and allow them to cool completely.
  - 5. FOR THE DECORATION:** Melt the chocolate (see [page 10](#)), and use a teaspoon to pour a small drop on each cookie. These cookies are good for about two weeks stored in an airtight container at room temperature.
-

**BAKING TIP:** The reason for using frozen blueberries is because fresh ones would overcook and burst after 5 to 7 minutes.





# Chocolate Crescents

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*This is a variation of the Vanillekipferl (Vanilla Crescent), which is well known in Germany, Austria and Hungary. The origin of the vanilla crescent cookie dates back to the pagan times, but it became popular more recently due to a nineteenth-century German researcher. He discovered the synthetic substitution for the vanilla bean, which is the main ingredient for this biscuit, and he called it vanillin. Today it has become an integral part of a traditional Christian's Christmas baking. In my variation the chocolate is dominant, which makes the taste totally different and surprisingly less sweet. It is a beloved tea or coffee biscuit that can be served all year long.*

## MAKES ABOUT 6 DOZEN COOKIES

### COOKIE DOUGH

- 1 CUP (170 GRAMS) SEMISWEET CHOCOLATE CHIPS
- 2½ CUPS (300 GRAMS) ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR
- ½ CUP (100 GRAMS) GRANULATED SUGAR
- 4 TABLESPOONS VANILLA SUGAR (SEE [PAGE 14](#))
- ¾ CUP (150 GRAMS) GROUND ALMONDS
- 2 STICKS (200 GRAMS) UNSALTED BUTTER, AT ROOM TEMPERATURE
- 1 MEDIUM EGG

### DECORATION

- 1 CUP (100 GRAMS) SEMISWEET CHOCOLATE CHIPS

- 1. FOR THE COOKIE DOUGH:** Melt the chocolate (see [page 10](#)). Combine the flour, granulated sugar, vanilla sugar, and ground almonds in the bowl of an electric mixer. Stir to mix and then add the butter and egg. Beat the dough with the dough hook attachment until it is smooth. Add the melted chocolate to the dough and beat it with the electric mixer until it is smooth, 3 to 5 minutes. Form the dough into a small loaf. Wrap the loaf in plastic wrap and let it rest in the refrigerator for about 1 hour.
2. Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C).
3. Divide the dough into four equal portions and shape each portion into a roll that is about 9¾ inches (25 cm) long. Using a sharp knife, cut the rolls into slices about ½ inch (1 cm) thick and form the slices into balls. Roll the balls in your palm and form them into crescent or half-moon shapes.
4. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and then place the crescents carefully on the pan about 1 inch (2.5 cm) apart. Bake the cookies for 8 to 10 minutes. Carefully transfer the cookies to a cooling rack using a pastry spatula and allow them to cool completely.
- 5. FOR THE DECORATION:** Melt the chocolate (see [page 10](#)) and dip both ends of the crescents into the melted chocolate. Place the cookies back on the cooling rack and allow them to dry at room temperature. These cookies are good for about three weeks stored in an airtight container at room temperature.



**BAKING TIP:** If you oil the cooling rack before placing the cookies on it, the chocolate will not stick and it will be easier to remove your cookies once the chocolate is cool.



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