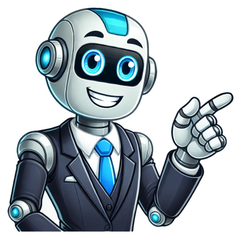
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America's test kitchen chocolate chip cookies

Combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in medium bowl. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter and Sucanat together on medium-high speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add egg and yolk and vanilla and mix until combined, about 1 minute. Reduce speed to low, add flour mixture, and mix until combined, about 1 minute, scraping down bowl as needed. Add chocolate and mix until combined, about 30 seconds. Give dough final stir by hand. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and let rest at room temperature for 30 minutes. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Working with scant 3 tablespoons of dough at a time, roll into balls and space 2 inches apart on prepared sheets. Bake cookies, 1 sheet at a time, until light golden brown and edges have begun to set but centers are still soft, 12 to 15 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Let cookies cool completely on sheet. Serve. We set out to perfect the back-of-the-bag classic with a cookie that was crisp at the edges, chewy in the middle, and full of rich toffee flavor.By Charles KelseyPublished on May 1, 2009Chewy middle with crisp and caramelized edgesFlavor more complex than mere buttery sweetnessA simple enough recipe to make anytimeSince Nestlé first began printing the recipe for Toll House cookies on the back of chocolate chip bags in 1939, generations of cooks have packed them into lunches, taken them to bake sales, and kept them on hand for snacking—arguably more so than any other kind of cookie. I've made countless batches myself over the years. The recipe is so easy: Cream butter and sugar (half white and half brown), add two eggs and vanilla, then mix in all-purpose flour, salt, baking soda, some chopped nuts, and the chips. Drop tablespoons of dough on a cookie sheet, bake at 350 for 10 minutes, and you're done.An early advertisement from 1942 promoting Nestlé Toll House Cookies.The Toll House cookie's cakey texture and buttery flavor certainly have their appeal. But is it really the best that a chocolate chip cookie can be? In my opinion, a truly great cookie offers real complexity, not just a one-note sweet taste and uniform texture. My ideal has always been this: a chocolate chip cookie that's moist and chewy on the inside and crisp at the edges, with deep notes of toffee and butterscotch to balance its sweetness. What would it take to achieve the perfect specimen?I'm not the first to think the Toll House cookie could stand improvement.Not too long ago, The New York Times published a recipe inspired by famed New York City pastry chef Jacques Torres trumpeting an unusual tactic for creating more complex flavor in a chocolate chip cookie: resting the dough a full 24 hours before baking. The rest enables the flour to fully absorb moisture from the eggs, leading to drier dough that caramelizes more quickly in the oven and achieves richer flavor. Or at least that's the theory. When I tried the recipe, tasters found it did have a slightly deeper toffee taste than the Toll House cookie—but not nearly enough to warrant the inconvenience of a 24-hour rest.Several Boston-area bakeries employ their own dough-resting techniques, some of them even more drastic: At Flour Bakery in the South End, chef Joanne Chang swears by a rest of two or even three days. Clear Flour Bread, near our offices in Brookline, portions the dough and freezes it before baking, a trick that helps prevent the dough from spreading too much (and that keeps the center of the cookie moist and chewy). Fine ideas for professional kitchens—but who at home wants to wait two days to bake or try jamming even one cookie sheet into the freezer?Other chefs endorse "pet" ingredients to get better results. Following the lead of pastry chef Christina Tosi at Manhattan's Momofuku Bakery and Milk Bar, I added milk powder to the Toll House dough. Tosi finds it brings depth to her baked goods; I found it just made the cookies taste milky. I also experimented with a slew of even less likely additives, including tapioca powder, brown rice flour, and xanthan gum—all suggestions for ensuring chewier texture. In each case, tasters were unanimous: No, thanks.I wasn't having luck on the flavor or chewiness fronts, but an approach for increasing crispness from the Toll House creator herself, Ruth Wakefield, seemed worth trying: In a variation on her chocolate chip cookie recipe published in Toll House Tried and True Recipes (1940), Wakefield swaps all-purpose flour for cake flour. But the swap yielded a cookie so crumbly that it practically disintegrated after one bite. I wasn't exactly surprised. Cake flour has less protein (6 to 8 percent) than all-purpose flour (10 to 12 percent). Protein is one of the building blocks of gluten, which gives baked goods their structure. The less protein, the less structure, and the more crumbly the end product.When making baked goods that should be tender and delicate, using cake flour is an easy way to reduce the protein content in the batter and minimize gluten production.It was time to come up with my own ideas. Since small tweaks in a baking recipe can translate to big differences, I would break down the Toll House recipe into its main components and see what changes I could invoke by playing around with ingredients and proportions.I decided to start by tackling texture, first zeroing in on the impact of the fat. I already knew I wanted to stick with butter—vegetable shortening and oil could never compete with its rich flavor. The Toll House recipe calls for creaming the butter with the sugar, which creates tiny air bubbles that bring a cakey lift to cookies. Developing a recipe for Brown Sugar Cookies, I discovered that melting the butter before combining it with the other ingredients led to a chewier texture. Here's why: Butter contains up to 18 percent water. When butter melts, the water separates from the fat and can then interact with the proteins in flour to create more structure-enhancing gluten. Melting the two sticks of butter called for in the Toll House recipe created a relative abundance of water (more than 3 tablespoons), for cookies that tasters found noticeably chewier.Since I was melting butter, I saw an opportunity to brown it, a technique we often use in the test kitchen to add nutty flavors to food. Sure enough, it worked here as well. But since browning burns off some of the butter's moisture, I made sure not to brown all of it.Browned butter, or beurre noisette as it is called in French, translates literally as "hazelnut butter"; as the butter browns, it takes on the flavor and aroma of toasted nuts.Next ingredient under the microscope: sugar. Besides adding sweetness, sugar affects texture. White sugar granules lend crispness, while brown sugar, which is hygroscopic (meaning it attracts and retains water, mainly from the air), enhances chewiness. All that moisture sounded like a good thing—too good, in fact. Cookies from the all-brown-sugar batch I baked were beyond chewy; they were so moist, they were nearly floppy. The Toll House recipe calls for an equal amount of white and brown sugar; I got the best results when I simply upped the brown sugar (tasters preferred dark for its deeper flavor) to 60 percent and knocked the granulated down to 40 percent.The cookie made with brown sugar (left) baked up chewy and easily bent around a rolling pin. The cookie made with white sugar (right) emerged from the oven crisp and dry, and snapped immediately when bent.Next came flour. I had already seen how cake flour, with its low protein content, yields a crunchy, crumbly cookie. What if I took the opposite tack and tried bread flour, with its higher protein content of 12 to 14 percent? Again, this was going too far: The cookies were so dense and chewy that they were breadlike. In the end, just cutting back on the all-purpose flour by 1⁄2 cup increased moistness in the cookies and allowed the chewiness contributed by the brown sugar to come to the fore. The only problem: With less flour, the cookies were a little greasy. To resolve the issue, I decreased the butter by 2 tablespoons.Finally, I was ready to evaluate the role of eggs in my batter. I knew from experience that egg whites, which contain much of the protein in the egg, tend to create cakey texture in baked goods—not what I wanted in my cookies. What's more, as the cookies bake, any white that isn't fully absorbed in the batter readily dries out, which can leave a cookie crumbly. Eliminating one egg white was the right way to go, resulting in cookies that were supremely moist and chewy.I had achieved chewiness, but what about my other goals? The crisp edges and deep toffee flavor were still missing, and short of melting candy into the dough, I was stumped on how to create these effects. That's when batch number 43 came along.In the middle of stirring together the butter, sugar, and eggs, I stopped to take a phone call. Ten minutes later, I found the sugars had dissolved and the mixture had turned thick and shiny, like frosting. I didn't think much of it until I pulled the finished cookies from the oven. Instead of the smooth, matte surface of the previous batches, these cookies emerged with a slightly glossy sheen and an alluring surface of cracks and crags. One bite revealed a rush of deep, toffeelike flavor. Mysteriously, these cookies finally had just the texture I was aiming for: crisp on the outside and chewy within. When I made the cookies bigger (3 tablespoons versus the rounded tablespoon called for in the Toll House recipe), the contrast was even greater.I knew it wasn't just luck, so I pulled our science editor onto the case. His theory was that by allowing the sugar to rest in the liquids, more of it dissolved in the small amount of moisture before baking. The dissolved sugar caramelizes more easily, creating a spectrum of toffee flavors and influencing texture. When sugar dissolved in water is heated, the moisture burns off and its molecules break apart, creating a brittle, amorphous structure that translates to crisper texture. But that effect occurs mainly at the cookie's outer edges. Just like an evaporating lake, as moisture on the perimeter disappears, the remaining moisture becomes concentrated in the center.Now all that was left was finessing the baking time and temperature. With caramelization in mind, I kept the temperature hot, 375 degrees—the same as for Toll House cookies. Watching carefully, I left the cookies in the oven until they were golden brown, just set at the edges, and soft in the center, between 10 and 14 minutes.I sat down with a tall glass of milk and a sample from my weeks of labor and more than 700 cookies baked. My cookie was crisp and chewy, gooey with chocolate, with a complex medley of sweet, buttery, caramel, and toffee flavors. Perfection is a subjective judgment at best, so I held one more blind tasting, pitting my cookie against the Toll House classic. The verdict? My cookies weren't just better—they were perfect.Chewy middle with crisp and caramelized edgesWe use a slightly higher ratio of dark brown sugar (enhances full flavor and chewiness) to white sugar (lends crispness). We use melted (not softened) butter for structure and simply portion out more dough per cookie (bigger cookies mean chewier centers).Flavor more complex than mere buttery sweetnessBrowning melted butter develops complex flavor to balance the sweetness in the cookie. Sugar that is dissolved in liquid before baking caramelizes more easily in the oven, creating finished cookies with more complex, toffee-like flavor.A simple enough recipe to make anytimeOur recipe skips the time-consuming step of waiting for the butter to soften on the counter so you can satisfy a cookie craving even faster.RecipePerfect Chocolate Chip CookiesWe set out to achieve a cookie that was crisp at the edges, chewy in the middle, and full of rich toffee flavor. The result? One of our most popular recipes of all time.Get the RecipeRecipeBrown Sugar CookiesA chewy cookie with a crisp exterior and a big jolt of brown sugar flavor sounded easy to develop, but first we needed to understand the not-so-simple science of cookies.Get the Recipe Thick and chewy chocolate chip cookies are a classic, but their thin, crunchy, butterscotch-y cousins deserve a spot in the cookie jar, too. To make this possible, I went to the test kitchen and mixed together a bunch of ingredients—baking a lot of mishaps before I came to our Thin and Crispy Chocolate Chip Cookies recipe. Keep reading to see exactly how I got here. The good thing about the battle between thick and chewy chocolate chip cookies and thin and crispy chocolate chip cookies is that nobody loses—when done well, both styles are great. So I was excited when my editor handed me the assignment of developing a recipe for the thin and crispy variety.A good thin and crispy cookie needs to live up to its name. Rather than having a range of textures, these cookies must keep a consistent snap. Just like a good potato chip, the best crispy cookie will be as crispy in the middle as it is at the edge.In researching existing recipes, I found that there were two common tricks for creating thin, crispy chocolate chip cookies. One option was to simply increase the amount of butter in the recipe. This did make for thin and crispy cookies, as the extra butter melted and helped the cookies spread in the oven, but the cookies spread too much and were greasy from the extra fat. The other trick was to mix the batter entirely by hand—no creaming the butter and sugar using a mixer—so that the cookies held less air and thus had less structure, which also encouraged them to spread wide and thin. But again, these cookies spread too much and ran into each other on the baking sheet. That wouldn't do.I needed to find a middle ground between domed cookies and superflat cookies. I started by combining a melted stick of butter with ⅔ cup of sugar; my tasters liked a combination of granulated and brown sugars for that signature butterscotch flavor. I worked with a baseline of 1 cup of all-purpose flour, and I knew the batter needed eggs for structure. Two seemed like the right number, but the eggs were making the cookies rise a little too high. Losing the egg whites and using just two yolks made for lower-profile, crispier cookies. Vanilla extract, salt, and baking soda rounded out the batter ingredients. Mini chocolate chips, rather than full-size ones, also helped these cookies ride low.Left: The dough, divided, into 16 heaping tablespoon portioned on prepared sheets. Right: Use moistened fingers and press the dough portions into ½-inch thickness.I was making good progress, but the cookies weren't quite as crispy as I wanted. I tried fiddling with the oven temperature and rack placement, but in the end the solution was adding just 1½ tablespoons of whole milk. The milk provided extra moisture so that the cookies didn't completely dry out with the extra baking time required to crisp them up; plus, the natural sugars in the milk aided in browning. These cookies were good, but overspreading was still an issue.The batter needed a bit more flour to hold the cookies together and keep them from spreading too much. Just ¼ cup more did the trick, but the extra flour made the cookies a little too chewy. I was at my wit's end when a colleague suggested switching from all-purpose flour to lighter cake flour, which contains less protein and makes for more-tender baked goods. That solved the problem and was the finishing touch on my new favorite cookie: thin, crispy, studded with chocolate chips, and packed with flavor. Now that's the way these cookies crumble.RecipeThin and Crispy Chocolate Chip Cookies"I was excited to try this recipe. It did not disappoint!" — Cook's Country Member Jamie K. Start Baking This is a members' feature. After testing 40 variations, we discover how to make a thick, chewy gourmet shop cookie at home.YIELD Makes 1 1/2 dozen 3-inch cookiesTIME 45 minutes, plus 20 minutes coolingHeat oven to 325 degrees. Adjust oven racks to upper- and lower-middle positions. Mix flour, salt, and baking soda together in medium bowl; set aside. Either by hand or with electric mixer, mix butter and sugars until thoroughly blended. Mix in egg, yolk, and vanilla. Add dry ingredients; mix until just combined. Stir in chips. Following illustrations below, form scant 1/4 cup dough into ball. Holding dough ball using fingertips of both hands, pull into two equal halves. Rotate halves ninety degrees and, with jagged surfaces exposed, join halves together at their base, again forming a single cookie, being careful not to smooth dough's uneven surface. Place formed dough onto one of two parchment paper-lined 20-by-14-inch lipless cookie sheets, about nine dough balls per sheet. Smaller cookie sheets can be used, but fewer cookies can be baked at one time and baking time may need to be adjusted. (Dough can be refrigerated up to 2 days or frozen up to 1 month—shaped or not.) Bake, reversing cookie sheets' positions halfway through baking, until cookies are light golden brown and outer edges start to harden yet centers are still soft and puffy, 15 to 18 minutes (start checking at 13 minutes). (Frozen dough requires an extra 1 to 2 minutes baking time.) Cool cookies on cookie sheets. Serve or store in airtight container. Shaping Thick Chocolate Chip Cookies Thick and chewy chocolate chip cookies are a classic, but their thin, crunchy, butterscotch-y cousins deserve a spot in the cookie jar, too.YIELD Makes 16 cookiesTIME 1 hour, plus 20 minutes coolingAdjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Whisk flour, salt, and baking soda together in bowl. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, mix melted butter, granulated sugar, and brown sugar on low speed until fully combined. Increase speed to medium-high and beat until mixture is lightened in color, about 1 minute. Reduce speed to low; add egg yolks, milk, and vanilla; and mix until combined. Slowly add flour mixture and mix until just combined, scraping down bowl as needed. Using rubber spatula, stir in chocolate chips. Using greased 1-tablespoon measure, divide dough into 16 heaping-tablespoon portions on prepared sheets, 8 portions per sheet. Divide any remaining dough evenly among portions. Using your moistened fingers, press dough portions to ½-inch thickness. Bake cookies, 1 sheet at a time, until deep golden brown, 16 to 18 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Let cookies cool on sheet for 20 minutes. Serve. (Cookies can be stored at room temperature for up to 3 days.) Keys to the Perfect Texture Three sweeteners and a slow but effective baking technique yield cookies with a satisfying crunch and a praline-like texture.YIELD Makes about 4 dozen 2-inch cookiesTIME 1 hour, plus 20 minutes coolingAdjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper; set aside. Sift flour, salt, and baking soda onto large sheet of parchment paper; set aside. In bowl of standing mixer fitted with paddle attachment, beat melted butter, granulated sugar, brown sugar, and corn syrup at low speed until thoroughly blended, about 1 minute. Add yolk, milk, and vanilla; mix until fully incorporated and smooth, about 1 minute, scraping bottom and sides of bowl with rubber spatula as necessary. With mixer running on low speed, fold up 3 edges of parchment around dry ingredients to form a pouch (see illustrations below) and slowly shake dry ingredients into bowl; mix on low speed until just combined, about 2 minutes. Do not overbeat. Add chips and mix on low speed until distributed evenly throughout batter, about 5 seconds. Leaving about 2 inches between each ball, scoop dough onto parchment-lined baking sheets with 1 1/4-inch (1 tablespoon capacity) ice cream scoop. Bake 1 sheet at a time, until cookies are deep golden brown and flat, about 12 minutes. Cool cookies on baking sheet 3 minutes. Using wide metal spatula, transfer cookies to wire rack and let sit until crisped and cooled to room temperature. (Can be stored in airtight container for up to 1 week.) We scaled down our Perfect Chocolate Chip Cookies from 16 to eight cookies.YIELD Makes 8 cookiesTIME 50 minutes, plus 20 minutes cooling Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Line 18 by 13-inch rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper or silicone baking mat. Whisk flour and baking soda together in medium bowl; set aside. Melt 5 tablespoons butter in skillet over medium-high heat. Continue to cook, swirling skillet constantly, until butter is dark golden brown and has nutty aroma, 1 to 3 minutes longer. Transfer browned butter to large heatproof bowl. Add remaining 2 tablespoons butter and stir until completely melted. Add brown sugar, granulated sugar, vanilla, water, and salt to butter; whisk until fully incorporated. Add egg yolk; whisk until mixture is smooth with no sugar lumps remaining, about 30 seconds. Let mixture stand for 3 minutes, then whisk for 30 seconds. Repeat process of resting and whisking 2 more times (mixture should be thick, smooth, and shiny). Using rubber spatula, stir in flour mixture until just combined (dough will be stiff), about 1 minute. Stir in chocolate chips and nuts, if using. Give dough final stir by hand to ensure no flour pockets remain and ingredients are evenly distributed. Working with 3 tablespoons dough at a time, roll into balls and space them 2 inches apart on prepared sheet. Bake until cookies are golden brown and still puffy and edges have begun to set but centers are soft, 10 to 14 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Let cookies cool on sheet for 5 minutes, then transfer to wire rack. Let cookies cool completely before serving. (Cookies can be stored in zipper-lock bag for up to 3 days.)