

Ginger molasses cookies complete tradition



LYNDA BALSLEV/TASTEFOOD

The ginger and spice in the cookies go well with a spiced mulled wine called glogg.

and darkness creeps in, we light the candles. A hush envelops us as we gather around the tree, entranced by the flickering flames that illuminate the tree and warm the room.

Ginger Molasses Cookies

Active time: 25 minutes
Total time: 25 minutes, plus chilling time
Yield: Makes about 36 cookies

Ingredients:
2 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon ground allspice
½ teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
1 cup packed dark brown sugar
¾ cup unsalted butter, room temperature
1 large egg
½ cup unsulfured molasses
⅓ cup finely diced candied ginger
Sanding or demerara sugar for sprinkling

Steps:
Whisk the flour, baking soda, cinnamon, ground ginger, allspice, salt and cloves in a bowl to combine.

Cream the brown sugar and butter in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add the egg and molasses and mix well. Add the dry ingredients and mix to combine. Stir in the candied ginger. Refrigerate for 1 hour.

Heat the oven to 375 degrees. Line two rimless baking sheets with parchment paper. Roll the dough into 1 ½-inch balls. Arrange on baking sheet and gently flatten. Sprinkle with the sugar. Bake the cookies until set and crinkled on top, 12 to 15 minutes. Remove and cool.

Lynda Balslev is an award-winning cookbook author, recipe developer, tester and editor. Taste Food is distributed by Andrews McMeel Syndication.

If you celebrate Christmas, when do you get your tree? We wait until the week before Christmas to get ours. It's important that our tree is fresh and not dry for the holiday, because we celebrate Christmas Danish-style: by lighting live candles on the branches. Live candles are traditional on Nordic Christmas trees. It may sound risky, but when closely managed, it's quite safe and rewarding for its beauty.

The candles are inserted in special weighted holders perched on the branches, and the flames self-extinguish once the candles melt down to their base. It's a magical sight, traditionally first done on the eve of Christmas, or julaften, which is celebrated with a big holiday dinner.

We break Danish tradition in our home by lighting our tree candles the weekend before Christmas. This way, we can open our home to friends to enjoy the experience, which has become its own tradition. Naturally, there is plenty of food and libations. I load a table with platters of finger food, cheese, charcuterie meats and sweet treats such as these cookies.

The ginger and spice in the cookies go well with glogg (spiced mulled wine), which I make in a large pot swimming with orange peel, cinnamon and cloves. Once the sun sets



LYNDA BALSLEV

Salt varieties defined by iodine, sodium-levels, flavor

A physician colleague asked me to remind you the data are absolutely clear! Getting vaccinated plus maintaining your booster status is critical to preventing bad outcomes if you become infected with COVID-19 — especially if you are an older adult. Eat one more servings of a fruit or vegetable today to support a healthy immune system.



KATHY KOLASA

Q Table salt, kosher salt, and sea salt. What is the difference? NF, Greenville

A If you grew up, like I did, in an area where the soil lacked iodine, there is no question you would use iodized table salt to prevent the development of goiter. That's not as critical in today's world, paving the way to consider using salts without iodine like Kosher, sea and even pricey black lava and Himalayan pink salt. Savan Gandhi, a Brody fourth-year medical student found this information for you.

Have you ever wandered down the aisle of the grocery or specialty spice store and wondered what the differences between the different types of salt were? There is table salt, kosher salt, and sea salt, among many others. They are all so similar, yet different. Salt allows us to "level up" the foods that we cook and provide us with an essential mineral, sodium. Yes, sodium is a mineral we need. Sodium, while essential for normal body functioning, is important to consume in moderation, as an excess could cause issues related to high blood pressure.

You have likely come across table salt when dining in a restaurant. It was likely in a familiar-looking clear glass bottle with a metal cap or little paper packets. In our

society, this is the type of salt we see every day and is likely what you think of when you hear the word "salt." Table salt has a fine texture with small salt granules. A benefit of table salt is that it often has an important mineral — iodine — added. This salt is called iodized salt.

Our bodies do not naturally produce iodine and it is not commonly found in our diets. Iodine is essential for the function of our thyroid, which is important in maintaining regular activities of our bodies. As Dr. K mentions, unless you only eat foods grown in soils that lack iodine — a highly unlikely situation — or don't routinely eat fish, shellfish, turkey, eggs, dairy or beans — you get adequate amounts. Most salt does not naturally contain iodine and therefore does not contribute to a healthy functioning thyroid. But as a public health measure, salt was found to be a great vehicle to deliver iodine to everyone who needed it because it was cheap and accessible.

Using sea salt or kosher or even Himalayan pink salt may give the benefit of consuming less sodium while still getting great flavor enhancement. The benefit comes from how our taste buds encounter the larger and coarser crystals. Kosher salt gets its name from the historic use of koshering meats. Kosher salt's larger crystals are better at absorbing moisture from meats, aiding in the koshering process, and adding flavor or saltiness to the food.

Sea salt is another common

salt, often found in grinders or added to salty snacks. As the name implies, sea salt comes from saltwater. It is usually less processed than other salts and contains small amounts of potassium, magnesium and calcium, which add a teeny bit of flavor and nutrition. Sea salt, like kosher salt, has larger size granules and contains less sodium per teaspoon than table salt. This type of salt is typically used as a "finishing salt" to bring out flavors within our cooked foods. One common example is its use to bring out flavors in a chocolate chip cookie.

Salt enhances flavors and can lengthen the shelf-life of our foods (think country ham). But it is important to use it in moderation as sodium is very involved with our blood pressure regulation. The typical American eats more sodium than is needed daily. We should eat less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day but typically consume 3,400 mg. Those who eat lots of restaurant and processed foods may get 6,000 mg.

A great way to manage sodium intake is to cook more food at home, controlling how much salt is added to the food. Try using kosher or sea salt to get that nice salty flavor while limiting the amount of sodium at the same time. As for the salts from exotic places and of different colors you might find online or in gourmet stores, if you enjoy them and can afford their high price, be aware they don't give any specific real health benefits.

Professor emeritus Kathy Kolasa, a registered dietitian nutritionist and Ph.D., is an affiliate professor in the Brody School of Medicine at ECU. Contact her at kolaska@ecu.edu.

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Ming Dynasty a family-friendly option for a holiday feast

BY CHRISTINA RUOTOLO

Hot Dish

Every month, I go to dinner with a group of my friends. It's kind of like a social supper club. We order several appetizers, drinks, and entrees and enjoy catching up. We always pick a restaurant that treats us like family and makes us feel like we are eating dinner at someone's house. That is the feeling you get when you bring family or friends to Ming Dynasty. They help you leave the hustle and bustle behind and enjoy family time with a family feast, especially during the holidays.

Located in the Rivergate Shopping Center off 10th Street beside Ollie's, Ming Dynasty has been open for 36 years. Specializing in Mandarin, Schezwan and Cantonese dishes as well as authentic fine Chinese cuisine, it has built a steady following of customers. Loyal customers and support from the community are among many reasons the restaurant has stayed open for so long. Their roots are deep in the community, and owner Mary Yuen, her chefs and staff are not stopping anytime soon.

The menu features traditional Chinese offerings from fried rice and lo mein to meat and seafood as well as a variety of chow mein and egg foo young dishes. You can select classic sesame chicken, beef and broccoli, sweet and sour chicken, shrimp or pork



CHRISTINA RUOTOLO/HOT DISH WRITER

General Tso's chicken features tender chunks of chicken fried crispy and mixed in a thick, tangy sauce made with ginger, garlic and spices.

Szechuan style chicken, or maybe shrimp in a luscious lobster sauce. They also have an expansive hibachi menu with steak, shrimp, or chicken served with rice and veggies. The entire family is sure to find dishes to delight their palates all year long.

For our family-style holiday feast, let's start with a warm bowl of soup, the perfect dish to heat up your winter bones. I opted for the classic egg drop, which is a creamy protein-packed soup with glossy ribbons of beaten eggs that have been whisked into a thickened seasoned chicken broth. Other soups include hot and sour, wonton, seafood or the house special with beef, shrimp and

vegetables.

Next, I tried several appetizers that are perfect for the entire family. The first was the crab rangoon. Start with a wonton wrapper, fill it with a mix of cream cheese, scallions and crab, wrap it like a little purse and fry to a golden brown. They final products are crispy little pockets of flavor. Breaking open the top reminds me of the origami paper fortune teller games we made out of loose-leaf paper in school. Open the top and the flavor awaits just like life's answers did back in school.

The next appetizer I sampled was the pan-seared pork dumplings. Dumplings are a quintessential part of Japanese and Chinese

culture and are traditionally served during the Chinese Lunar year. Many believe that the lunar-shaped dumplings symbolize the brightness of the moon and promise for a bright and prosperous year ahead. They also believe that wealth was measured by how many gold bars you had and the bars were shaped like these little crescent-shaped dumplings. The edible wealth inside these seared dumplings was meaty and full of vibrant flavors.

Now that you have enjoyed soup and appetizers, let's enjoy the main attraction. You only need to order a few entrees as each dish is large enough to feed two-three people. Select your favorite dishes then serve them family style, which is a great way to make you feel like you are at your family table anytime you go out to dinner. I started with a customer favorite, General Tso's chicken. This dish starts with tender chunks of chicken fried to a crispy texture mixed in a thick, tangy sauce made with ginger, garlic and spices. The dish is paired with rice and fresh sauteed broccoli. I don't know who General Tso is but he must be a good guy because his dish is delightful.

Next, I tried the moo shu chicken which is a Chinese-style stir fry made with grilled chicken sauteed with chopped mushrooms, cabbage, and onion in a tasty brown sauce. The dish is served with a side of rice and four pancakes. Take a spoonful of



the mixture, add it to one of the delicate pancakes, add a spoonful of the thick decadent plum sauce and wrap it up. It eats like a burrito but, Chinese style. It was a tasty and perfect fun family option for dinner.

To end my tasting, I tried the Yakisoba noodles with hibachi chicken and shrimp and served with sauteed sweet carrots, zucchini, broccoli and onions paired with fried or white rice. It's also served with a tangy ginger sauce and a white sauce. Yakisoba noodles are flat, buckwheat noodles that are twice as wide as spaghetti noodles and have a mellow taste. They have a nice texture to them and pair nicely with any hibachi-style meat or seafood and are a great alternative to rice.

Don't forget Ming Dynasty has a full-service bar, as well as dine-in lunch and dinner service. Lunch hours are 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday and Sunday noon-3 p.m. Dinner hours are 4-9:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 4-10 p.m. Friday, and 4-10 p.m. Saturday. For more information, or to place your to-go order, call 252-752-7111. You can also view their entire menu at www.mingdynastygreenville.com.



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