

Getty Cuneiform Cookies

"Quick, come here, take the clay, knead it, flatten it, mix it, roll it like a ball, make it thick, make the tablet."

—Scribal Quote, 1800 BC

Follow our simple cookie recipe and practice basic pictographs and cuneiform words to create your own tasty tablets in this family friendly activity. Ancient history never tasted so good!

Ingredients

- 2 cups all-purpose flour (+ more for dusting)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ginger powder
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon allspice
- ½ teaspoon cardamom powder
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter (soften in advance, leave at room temperature)
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- 2 egg yolks
- ½ teaspoon vanilla

Baking supplies

- 2 Mixing bowls
- Measuring cups
- Measuring spoons
- Electronic mixer (or mix by hand)
- Plastic wrap or baggies
- Chopsticks, wooden dowels, or coffee stirrer for cuneiform
- Toothpicks or bamboo skewer for pictographs
- Baking mat
- Spatula
- Nonstick cookie sheet

Directions

1. Remove butter from refrigeration and let soften for 30 minutes prior to starting the recipe.
2. In Mixing Bowl 1: Combine most of the dry ingredients (**flour, salt, spices**). Mix ingredients together and set aside.
3. In Mixing Bowl 2: Combine **softened butter, sugar, and powdered sugar**. Mix by hand or at medium to low speed if using an electronic mixer. Continue mixing until all the ingredients are thoroughly combined.
4. Add **egg yolks** and **vanilla** to Mixing Bowl 2 and mix ingredients as above.
5. Slowly add the dry ingredients from Mixing Bowl 1 into Mixing Bowl 2. Mix by hand or at low speed if using an electronic mixer. Once flour starts incorporating, turn up the speed to medium. Thoroughly mix all of the ingredients to produce smooth, well-blended cookie dough (no lumps!).



Left: Student's cuneiform exercise tablet, Babylonian, around 2000-1500 BC, Metropolitan Museum 86.11.251.



Thoroughly mix all of the ingredients



Roll pieces of dough into small balls



Draw pictographs and write cuneiform

Directions continued

6. Make a dough ball, divide it in half, and wrap the individual halves in plastic wrap (or put them in baggies).
7. Pat down the wrapped dough to form disks.
8. Refrigerate dough for 30 minutes or freeze for 15 minutes. The dough will be easier to roll out once it's rested and completely chilled.
9. Once dough is chilled, remove one disk from the fridge, break off a few pieces to work with, keeping the remaining dough refrigerated.
10. Roll pieces of dough into small balls then flatten balls to form cookie tablets about 2½ inches in diameter and ¼ to ½ inch thick.
11. Draw cuneiform words with your chopstick, skewer, or toothpick. Then refrigerate your unbaked cookies for another 30 minutes or freeze for 15 minutes. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
12. Bake the cookies at 350 degrees for 12–15 minutes. Let cool completely on a baking rack.
13. Eat your work! Share pictures on Instagram and tag #Gettymuseum.

Tips

- Use flour to dust the work surface to prevent the dough from sticking.
- Make a few cookies at a time, allowing remaining dough to stay cool as you work.
- Cold dough (cold butter) is easier to work with.
- Tablet cookies should be about ¼-½ inch thick, no more.
- Use the corner of wooden chopsticks and wooden bamboo skewers or toothpicks to draw on the dough.
- Make deep impressions to ensure your cuneiform and pictographs remain visible after baking.
- Make sure you chill the cookies well before baking—this will ensure your marks are clear.

Special thanks to Joanne Povanit, Executive Pastry Chef, Getty Center and Getty Villa for her invaluable insight into creating this recipe.