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Cooking

Cookies for Christmas
Jennifer Dorland Darling
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If there were ever a time when people need shortcuts, the holidays are the time. So a cookie cookbook that has a substantial chapter on Sugarplum Shortcuts is a welcome time-saver. Consider baking three different cookies from one dough: Santa's Whiskers, Chocolate-mint Thumbprints and Lemon-almond Tea Cookies. Or, making Simple Fudge Tarts using purchased peanut butter cookie dough for crusts or No-Bake Butterscotch treats.

Over 130 recipes, fresh takes on traditional cookies and entirely new creations, are presented in intelligent layout. Generous use of white space allows the baker to work through each recipe with ease, catching the recipe name before an enticing line or two of explanation. The ingredients are clearly listed at left in an easily read type size. Preparation and baking times are first to the right of each recipe page, followed by step-by-step recipes, again visually separated by adequate white space—a much-appreciated feature in cookbooks.

Its color photography in the spirit of the season is exceptionally exquisite. The photos invite duplication, even innovation, in the reader's kitchen, and they enhance the preparation directions that are already clear enough to stand alone. Finally, nutrition facts are included for the health-conscious baker.

Although the cookies Darling focuses on are clearly Christmas cookies, she not only manages to present fresh recipes, but also arranges them into categories that are both intriguing and sensible. The Old World Favorites chapter is educational. Sweeten the Scene is full of ideas to use cookies attractively throughout the home, from ornaments to gingerbread houses. It is a highly original chapter about an often hackneyed subject.

Further, Darling covers most every cookie type imaginable: cutouts, rolls, pressed and piped doughs, spritz, twists, sliced (icebox cookies) and drop types, bars and brownies. The recipes also cover a taste range from sweet (Sugar Cookie Pinwheels) to savory (Apricot-Sage cookies).

Admittedly this sweet book is a little heavy on frosting, usually Royal Icing which is suitable for most decorated cookies. This culinary sin, however, is forgivable since Cookies for Christmas is a book of sweet treats. The individual baker can always frost with a light hand.

Little, if anything, is missing from Cookies for Christmas since it includes a reliable index, metric cooking information and emergency baking substitutions. If readers are thinking about Christmas cookies, this is an exceptionally delightful book.

Sally Ketchum