Gingerbread Men

Ingredients:

8 Tbs. (1 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar

1/4 cup granulated sugar

1/2 cup light molasses

1 egg yolk

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1/2 tsp. baking soda

1 1/2 tsp. ground ginger

1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon

1/4 tsp. ground cloves

1/2 tsp. salt

Royal icing for decorating (see related recipe at left)

Colored sugars and other decorations as desired

Directions:

In a large bowl, using an electric mixer, beat the butter on high speed until fluffy and pale yellow. Add the brown sugar and granulated sugar and beat until the mixture is no longer gritty when rubbed between your finger and thumb. Reduce the speed to low and gradually beat in the molasses. Add the egg and beat until the mixture is blended.  
  
Sift the flour, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon, cloves and salt together onto a sheet of waxed paper. Gradually add the flour mixture to the butter mixture, beating on low speed or stirring with a wooden spoon until well blended.  
  
Turn the dough out onto a floured work surface and, with floured hands, form into a large, smooth mound. Divide the dough into 4 equal portions, shape into disks and wrap each disk in plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours or up to 2 days.  
  
Preheat an oven to 400°F. Lightly grease 2 baking sheets or line them with parchment paper.  
  
Working with 1 disk at a time, roll out the dough between 2 sheets of waxed paper to a thickness of about 1/4 inch. Using gingerbread cookie cutters 3 to 5 inches tall, cut out figures. Using an offset spatula, transfer the cookies to a prepared baking sheet. Repeat with the remaining dough portions, then gather up the scraps and reroll them. If the scraps of dough have become sticky, refrigerate them for 10 minutes before rerolling. For best results, do not roll the same piece of dough more than twice.  
  
Bake the gingerbread figures until lightly browned on the bottom, about 6 minutes. Let cool on the sheets for 5 minutes, then transfer the cookies to wire racks and let cool completely. Dress up the cooled gingerbread figures with the royal icing, sugars and other decorations. Makes 2 to 5 dozen cookies, depending on size.

Royal Icing

Ingredients:

3 egg whites, at room temperature

4 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar

1/2 tsp. cream of tartar

Pinch of salt

A few drops of vanilla extract or fresh  
 lemon juice (optional)

Directions:

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat the egg whites, confectioners' sugar, cream of tartar and salt on medium-low speed until blended. Add the vanilla or lemon juice, increase the speed to medium-high, and continue beating until stiff peaks form and the mixture is nearly triple in volume, 7 to 8 minutes.   
  
Remove the bowl from the mixer, cover tightly with plastic wrap and store at room temperature until ready to use, up to 6 hours.