Shortbread Cookies

1 cup butter (2 sticks)

3/4 cups powdered sugar

1 Tbs. vanilla extract

2 1/2 cups all purpose flour

1 tsp. salt

Cream the butter, powdered sugar, and vanilla extract until creamy. Add flour and salt and mix until thoroughly combined and a dough forms. Refrigerate for at least one hour. Roll on a heavily floured surface until the dough is 1/6 inch thick. Cut into desired shapes. Refrigerate for 10-15 minutes (while the oven is preheating). Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and bake cookies for 15-20 minutes, or until golden brown. Cool and decorate as desired.

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.