

HEART-SHAPED SUGAR COOKIES WITH ROYAL ICING

(cookies from Mom Advice and icing from Karen's Kitchen Stories)

2 1/2 cups flour

3/4 cup superfine sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt

16 tablespoons (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into 1/2" pieces & softened

2 tablespoons cream cheese, softened

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Heat the oven to 375 F.

Whisk the flour, sugar, & salt together in a large bowl. Beat the butter into the flour mixture, one piece at a time using an electric mixer on medium-low speed, then continue to beat until the mixture looks crumbly and slightly wet, 1 to 2 minutes. Beat in the cream cheese & vanilla until the dough just begins to form large clumps, about thirty seconds.

Knead the dough in the large bowl by hand a few times until it forms a large, cohesive mass. Turn the dough out onto a clean counter, divide it in half, and pat each into a disk shape. Wrap the disks tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate until they begin to firm up, about 30 minutes.

Work with one disk at a time, roll out the dough to a 1/8" thickness between two sheets of parchment paper. Cut out shapes using cookie cutters and lay on two parchment-lined baking sheets, spaced about 1" apart. Bake the cookies until light golden brown, about ten minutes, rotating the baking sheet halfway through baking.

Let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for two minutes before transferring them to a wire rack to cool completely, about thirty minutes. When completely cooled, the cookies will be ready for icing.

ROYAL ICING

4 cups powdered sugar, sifted
2 tbsp meringue powder
5 tbsp water, plus more to thin the icing
Gel food coloring
endless amount of Zen

Place the powdered sugar, meringue powder, and water into a bowl of a stand mixer and mix with the paddle attachment on medium low for about 7 to 10 minutes, until the mixture looks matte. Transfer the mixture to an airtight container.

At this point, the mixture is too thick to pipe. Add more water by tablespoon to the mixture, stirring thoroughly between additions, until it is at a consistency that can be piped. Add any coloring you might be using. If you are using more than one color, divide the mixture among airtight containers before adding the color. In my case, I used some pink gel to turn the mixture pink for piping and flooding, and red gel for the decorations.

Place the flooding icing into plastic squeeze condiment bottle. Line the outer edge of each cookie with icing, allow it to set for about one hour. One cookie at a time, squeeze some of the icing in the center and spread it with a toothpick to the edges. Dot a contrasting color onto the icing with more icing of the same consistency. Drag a toothpick through the dots to create “artsy” hearts. Let the icing dry for about 3 hours.