

SWEETHEART SUGAR COOKIES WITH ROYAL ICING

(adapted from [Alton Brown](#) and [Sweet Sugarbelle](#))

for the cookie dough:

3 cups all-purpose flour (360 g)
3/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup unsalted butter, softened (225 g)
1 cup sugar (225 g)
zest of 1 lemon
1 egg, beaten
1/2 tsp vanilla paste
1 tablespoon milk

for the icing:

2 pounds confectioner's sugar (907 grams)
5 tablespoons meringue powder (53 grams)
2 teaspoons vanilla bean extract (I used clear vanilla extract)
1/2-3/4 cups warm water

Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Set aside. Place butter and sugar in large bowl of electric stand mixer and beat until light in color. Add egg, lemon zest, milk and vanilla, beat to combine. Put mixer on low-speed, add flour, and mix just until the mixture starts to form a dough. Do not over mix or your cookies might be tough. Remove the dough from the mixer and finish mixing it by hand, gently. Divide the dough in half, flatten each portion as a square or rectangle and wrap in plastic foil. Refrigerate for 1 hour minimum.

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Remove one wrapped pack of dough from refrigerator at a time, sprinkle rolling-pin with powdered sugar, and roll out dough to 3/8-inch thick. Cut into heart shapes, place on baking sheet over parchment paper, and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes or until cookies are just beginning to turn brown around the edges, rotating cookie sheet halfway through baking time. Let sit on baking sheet for 2 minutes after removal from oven and then move to cool on a rack. Ice the cookies when completely cool, or on the following day.

Make the icing (you can make the day before and store well covered at room temperature). Stir the vanilla into half of the water and reserve. Keep the other half of the water measured and ready to go.

Using a paddle attachment gently mix the sugar and meringue powder. With the mixer on the lowest setting slowly add the water/flavoring mix to the dry ingredients. As the water is added, the icing will become thick and lumpy. Continue to add the remaining water {this may or may not be the entire amount} until the mixture reaches a thick consistency. At this point, turn the mixer to medium speed and whip 2-4 minutes until the mixture is thick and fluffy. When it forms a soft peak, it has been beaten enough. Avoid mixing further, as you don't want to incorporate too much air in the icing. Too much air might result in bubbles forming after icing.

Adjust the consistency that you need for flooding the cookies, separate the icing in portions, add dye according to your planned decoration. Store in air-tight containers at room temperature. If needed, re-adjust the consistency before piping.

Add the different colors of icing to piping bags fitted with the appropriate icing tips. I like number 3 for the basic color used for flooding, and a number two for the details. Flood each cookie, make the edges as neat as possible with the scribe tool. Decorate with the design you like, one cookie at a time, as the base color needs to still be wet, unless you prefer to do a wet-on-dry method. In this case, the base needs to dry for several hours before proceeding with the decoration.

Dry the cookies for at least 6 hours before handling them.