**Lebkuchen**

The forerunner of today's Lebkuchen, or gingerbread, was called the "honey cake" and its history can be traced back to the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans. They believed that honey, the only sweetener widely available to them, was a gift of the deities and had magical and healing powers. Honey cakes were also worn as a talisman in battle or as protection against evil spirits. Modern Lebkuchen was invented by monks in Franconia, Germany in the 13th century. Lebkuchen bakers were recorded as early as 1296 in Ulm, and 1395 in Nürnberg (Nuremberg). The latter is the most famous exporter today of the product known as Nürnberger Lebkuchen. It is often decorated with icing and nuts, and is not only a popular Christmas treat, but also widely found during the whole year as Lebkuchenherzen, or gingerbread hearts. Get creative with decorating your version of this favorite treat!

1/3 cup and 2 Tbsp and 1 tsp honey

1/3 cup and 2 Tbsp and 1 tsp dark molasses

2-3/4 cups and 3 Tbsp sifted all-purpose flour 2/3 cup and 1 Tbsp brown sugar

1/2 tsp baking soda 1/2 tsp ground allspice

1-1/4 tsp ground nutmeg 1-1/4 tsp ground cinnamon

1/2 tsp ground cloves 1 egg

In a large bowl, beat the egg, brown sugar and honey until smooth. Stir in the molasses. Combine the flour, baking soda, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and allspice; incorporate into the molasses mixture. Stir in the almonds and candied fruit peel, if using. Cover or wrap dough, and chill overnight.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Grease cookie sheets.

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough out to 1/4 inch in thickness. Cut into the desired shape. Place cookies 1 1/2 inches apart onto cookie sheets.

Bake for 10 to 12 minutes in the preheated oven, until firm. Cool and decorate as described below.

Lemon Glazed:

Make the lemon glaze. Recipe below. In a small bowl, stir together the egg white, lemon juice and lemon zest. Mix in the confectioners' sugar until smooth. Brush over cookies. While still warm, brush the cookies with the lemon glaze. Lemon can be omitted to make a regular glaze.

For the icing:

1 egg white, beaten 1 Tbsp lemon juice

1/2 teaspoon lemon zest 1-1/3 cups and 2 Tbsp sifted confectioners' sugar

Traditional almond or fruit decoration:

 While dough is still uncooked, shape the cookies into discs. Use the slivered almonds and/or finely chopped candied mixed fruit to decorate the cookie – 5 point-stars are a popular choice.

Lebkuchen Männer

Use a gingerbread man cookie cutter to cut gingerbread into men shapes. Decorate with royal icing, recipe below, and with small candies. In large bowl of stand mixer combine the egg whites and vanilla and beat until frothy. Add confectioners' sugar gradually and mix on low speed until sugar is incorporated and mixture is shiny. Turn speed up to high and beat until mixture forms stiff, glossy peaks. This should take approximately 5 to 7 minutes. Add food coloring, if desired. For immediate use, transfer icing to pastry bag or heavy duty storage bag and pipe as desired. If using storage bag, clip corner. Store in airtight container in refrigerator for up to 3 days.

For the icing:

3 ounces pasteurized egg whites

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

4 cups confectioners' sugar