Cleo Coyle's Gingerbread Cookie Sticks *(Elegant, Edible Coffee Stirrers for Holiday Trays)*

Text and photos (c) by Alice Alfonsi who writes The Coffeehouse Mysteries as Cleo Coyle with her husband, Marc Cerasini.

H**ere is a more sophisticated take on the classic gingerbread cookie that will let you decorate your holiday dessert trays with unique style—and dunk and crunch with joy. Our readers may recognize this cookie from our 14th Coffeehouse Mystery Once Upon a Grind. The story kicks off with a Fairy Tale Festival in Central Park, which is also where the first crime scene occurs. Our amateur sleuth Clare is working at the festival with her merry band of baristas, who give her shop's coffee truck a Jack-in-the-Beanstalk makeover. Unfortunately for Clare, her coffee hunter ex-husband Matt brings his own "magic beans," coffee beans sourced from a legendary (but very real) area of Africa, and they bring Giant trouble. These cookies, on the other hand, are designed to bring joy. Drizzle them with melted white chocolate or make my vanilla glaze (recipe included). A final sprinkling of white (coarse) sparkling sugar will create a treat as pretty as a winter snowfall. May you bake them with love and eat with holiday joy! ~* ***Cleo

Makes 4-5 dozen cookie sticks, depending on size

For the cookies:

2-1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon table salt
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground allspice (or 1/8 teaspoon ground cloves)
10 tablespoons (1-1/4 sticks) unsalted butter, softened* Free
2/3 cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed
1/4 cup molasses (unsulphured, not blackstrap)
1/3 whole milk (or brewed coffee)*

To finish:

Vanilla Glaze (recipe included) and
White (coarse) sparkling sugar (1/4 cup)

Free Recipe Guide to Cleo's new culinary mystery ***No Roast for the Weary***: click here.

***Note:** To make this recipe dairy free replace butter with non-dairy margarine and whole milk with coffee or almond milk.*

Directions:

Step 1— Assemble the dry ingredients. In a mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon, and allspice (or cloves). Set aside.

Step 2—Make the dough. Using an electric mixer, cream the softened butter and dark brown sugar; add the molasses and milk (or coffee) and blend again. While continuing to beat at a low speed, slowly add in your dry ingredients, blending to make a smooth dough. Do not over-beat, but be sure all of the flour mixture is incorporated.

CLEO TIP #1: The dough should be sticky and in the next step you will chill it to harden up the butter, but you may need to adjust the dough slightly, depending on your climate. If your dough seems very wet, beat in a bit more flour. But don't overdo it because too much flour will toughen up your cookie.

Step 3—Wrap and chill. Form the sticky dough into 2 balls and flatten into disks. Wrap the two disks in plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour; overnight is fine, too. (If you're in a hurry, place the dough discs in the freezer for 20 minutes instead.) The chilling will harden up the butter and make the dough easier to work with for the next step.

Step 4—Roll the dough. First, preheat the oven to 350° F. Remove the chilled dough disks from the fridge and (if too hard) allow to warm just enough to become pliable. Place the dough between two sheets of lightly flour-dusted parchment paper. (This is a great method for rolling cookies because you will only need the lightest dusting of flour, which will keep the cookies from toughening up.) **Roll your dough thin,** about the thickness of a pie crust (around 1/8 inch).

CLEO TIP #2: If the dough becomes too warm as you roll it, and it sticks too much to the parchment paper, simply slip the whole thing onto a flat pan and place the pan in the fridge for 20 minutes or freezer for 15. Once the rolled-out dough is chilled, it will firm up and easily separate from the paper.

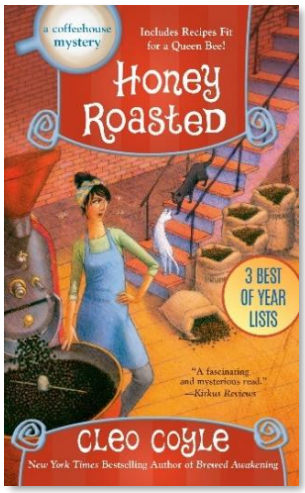
Step 5—Cut the cookies. Remove the top layer of parchment paper. Use a pizza cutter to clean up the edges of your rectangle and slice into sticks. Do not move the sticks off the bottom parchment layer. Simply slip the entire sheet of parchment onto a cookie sheet.

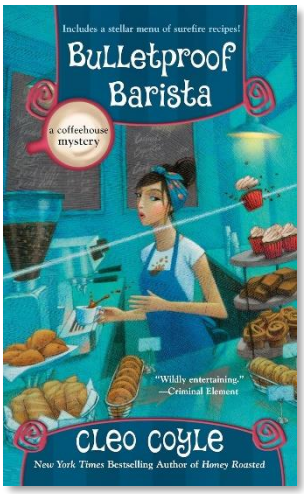
Step 6—Bake for 10 to 13 minutes. When the cookies are finished baking, you will need to recut them and you must do this while the cookies are still warm. Gently slide the entire sheet of parchment paper onto a cutting board or a sturdy counter surface and use your original slicing lines as a guide. The pizza cutter will make quick work of it, roll from the top down, as you see in my photo below, so you can easily follow your lines.

Step 7—COOL: You must allow the cookie sticks to cool completely before handling. If you try to move them while they are warm, they are very likely to crack and break (ask me how I know).

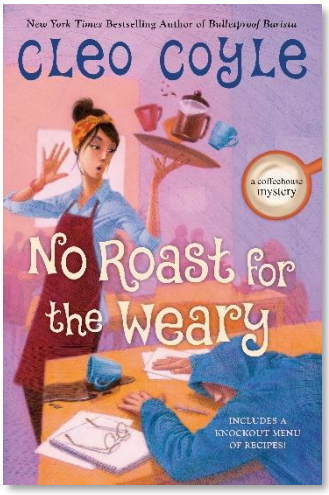
Step 8—Drizzle with glaze. Once cool, you can make the glaze (recipe on next page) or melt white chocolate and drizzle it on the sticks. Finish with a sprinkling of white sparkling sugar and...

Eat with joy! ~ Cleo





The Coffeehouse Mysteries are bestselling culinary mysteries, set in a landmark Greenwich Village coffeehouse. Each includes the added bonus of recipes.
To learn more and see more recipes, visit Cleo Coyle's online coffeehouse at www.CoffeehouseMystery.com
And her recipe blog at www.CleoCoyleRecipes.com



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Cleo's Vanilla Glaze

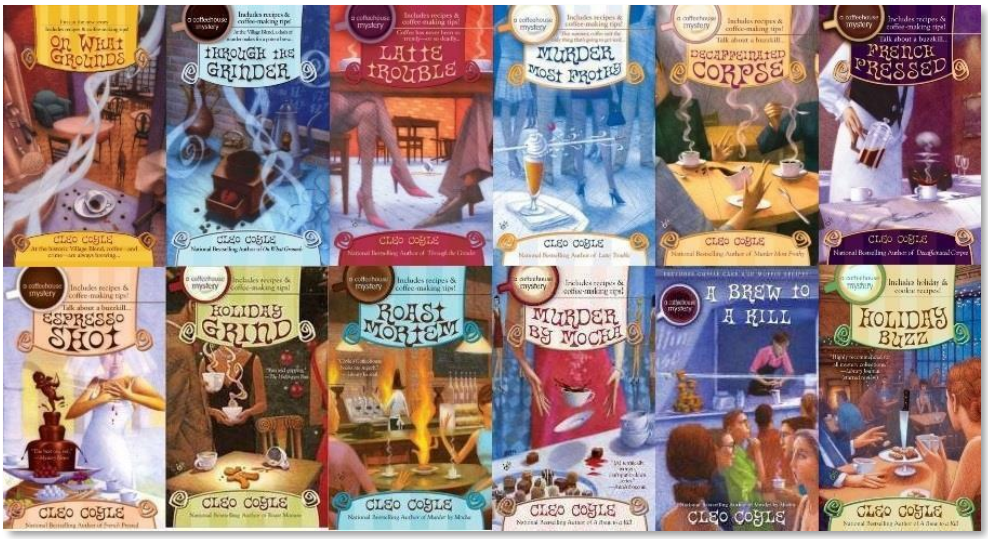
2 tablespoons butter or margarine
1 tablespoon milk or cream *(or almond milk)*
1 cup powdered sugar, sifted
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract *(for whiter glaze, use clear vanilla)*

Directions: In a small saucepan, over medium-low heat, melt the butter. Add milk and whisk in the powdered sugar, a little at a time. When all the sugar is melted into the butter and milk, remove from heat and stir in the vanilla.

TOO THICK? whisk in a bit more milk. **TOO THIN?** Add a bit more powdered sugar and continue to cook it down until it's thick enough.

TEST: Before drizzling on your cookie sticks, use a fork and drizzle a bit on a plate. If you're having trouble drizzling it nicely, then it's too thick. On the other hand, if the glaze doesn't harden fairly quickly after cooling, then it's too thin. Finally, if the glaze hardens in the pan or becomes crusty, whisk it over heat and add a bit more milk, and you will be able to return it to drizzling consistency again, and...

Eat with holiday joy! ~ Cleo Coyle



Learn more about author Cleo Coyle and get more of her recipes by visiting her online coffeehouse at www.CoffeehouseMystery.com

And her recipe blog at www.CleoCoyleRecipes.com

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