

## **‘Grand Central’ makes baking a breeze**

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*For The Register-Guard*

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### **The Grand Central Baking Book**

*By Piper Davis and Ellen Jackson*

*(Ten Speed Press, \$30 hardcover)*

Although we are knee-deep in prime baking season, let’s try to spread the butter and sugar wealth around. Start now, but keep up the good work throughout the year. You will be thanked richly.

The Grand Central Bakery in Portland was named one of the top 10 bakeries in the country by Bon Appétit magazine. Co-owner Piper Davis learned to cook from her mother, Gwyneth Bassetti, founder of the bakery. In “The Grand Central Baking Book” written with chef and food writer Ellen Jackson, Davis shares the recipes and techniques that won over Bon Appétit.

Grand Central is not a fussy bakery, Davis says in the introduction. She insists that any home baker can replicate the recipes. She carefully explains her philosophy of baking, and offers pantry and equipment necessities.

Precision is important in baking, which is why Davis advocates using a scale for measuring dry ingredients.

She gives amounts both in volume and weight, but says that once you try using a kitchen scale, you’ll be hooked.

The recipes are long, but that’s because of her detailed instructions. There are often photos that show step by step how to shape cookies, cinnamon rolls, hand pies: the so-that’s-how-you-do-it bits that make all the difference in making something pretty as well as delicious.

If you’ve been to Grand Central, you’ll notice that the cookies made from the recipes here are smaller than the ones they sell. That’s because a 5-inch cookie won’t fit into most cookie jars.

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Multiple-page workshops in “Grand Central” are like having Davis at your side, guiding you as you decorate cookies, make a four-layer birthday cake, create flaky pastry or gently form short dough.

Life isn’t all sweet at Grand Central. A “Mealtime” chapter steps into the savory side with rolls, casseroles, vegetable and meat pies, pot pies and pizzas.

“The Grand Central Baking Book” would make an excellent gift for anyone who would like to learn to be a better baker (or for someone you would like to bake for you.)

And speaking of cookies, sometimes what you need is a nice big peanut butter cookie. Davis likes soft cookies, but if you like yours on the crisp side, she says to just bake them a few minutes longer.

The recipe says to mark the dough balls with a fork, then flatten them into a disk. I had more luck flattening the balls a little first with my palm before pressing them with a fork.

You might want to try this with other nut butters (almond or cashew.) I’m sticking with the peanuts.

Santa’s been nice. Leave a couple for him.

## **PEANUT BUTTER COOKIES**

*Makes about 3 dozen cookies.*

**3 cups all-purpose flour**

**2 teaspoons baking soda**

**1 teaspoon salt (use 2 teaspoons if you’re using unsalted peanut butter)**

**1 cup (8 ounces, or 2 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature**

**1 cup (7 ounces) granulated sugar, plus extra for dusting**

**1 cup (7 ounces) packed light brown sugar**

**1 cup (9.5 ounces) peanut butter, at room temperature**

**2 eggs, at room temperature**

**2 teaspoons vanilla extract**

Prepare to bake: Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

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Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.

Combine the dry ingredients: Measure the flour, baking soda and salt into a bowl and whisk to combine. (Put the dry ingredients through a fine-mesh sieve if the flour or baking soda is clumpy.)

Cream the butter, sugar and peanut butter: Using a stand mixer with the paddle attachment, beat the butter, granulated sugar, and brown sugar on medium speed for 3 to 5 minutes, until mixture is lighter in color and fluffy.

Add the peanut butter and cream for another minute. Scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl several times during the process.

Incorporate the eggs and vanilla: While the mixer is running, crack the eggs into a liquid measuring cup and add the vanilla.

Reduce the speed to low, then slowly pour in the eggs, letting them fall one at a time and incorporating the first egg completely before adding the next. Scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl once during the process.

Add the dry ingredients: Gradually add the dry ingredients (in 2 to 3 additions) with the mixer on low speed. Scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl once, to fully incorporate the butter and sugar.

Shape the cookies: Scoop the dough into balls the size of pingpong balls (about 1 1/2 ounces.)

Arrange the dough balls on the prepared pans, 6 per pan. Lightly dust them with granulated sugar before pressing with a fork to make a crisscross pattern, and then press the cookies into 1/2-inch-thick disks.

Bake: Bake for 10 minutes, rotating the pans halfway through the baking time.

The tops of the fork marks and the edges of the cookies should be brown and crisp and the middle should be soft.

Let the cookies cool on the baking sheets.

***Kim Davaz of Eugene writes a biweekly cookbook review column.***

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