Praise for *Cookie Swap*

“Usher produces a wealth of eye-catching bakery, decoration and entertainment ideas for hosts of all experience levels... sure to appeal to fans of the Barefoot Contessa and Martha Stewart.”

—Publisher's Weekly

“Her whimsical designs and ideas make this book as fun as it is informative. Open it to any page—you’re bound to be inspired.”

—Tab Doyle, Editor, *Desert Professional* (formerly *Chocolates*)

“Move over, Martha. This book, with its cute-named cookies, stunning food styling, and personalized party ideas, establishes Usher as a serious pastry party authority.”

—YumSugar

“Julia Usher’s gorgeous and double ideas inspire us not only to trade cookies at holiday time but the whole year through. Filled to the brim with mouthwatering recipes and delectable photographs, *Cookie Swap* is a sweet treat to savor and celebrate.”

—Nancy Wallop Hopkins, *Better Homes and Gardens*
JULIA M. USHER’S
ultimate cookies
to my mom

For letting me ride her apron strings and teaching me that baking from scratch is one of the truest expressions of the heart.

Mom decorating cookies with me and my sister Betsy, circa 1971. (I’m the one still in my jammies, wondering if my star cookie is up to snuff!!)
No trivial amuse-bouche, this intro chapter is fully loaded. It starts with “Basics” (p. 13), which includes an inventory of the decorating tools that no decorator, beginner or otherwise, should be without, as well as tips for using my favorite decorating tool and icing. It then moves to “Bedazzlers” (p. 23), which introduces what I call the “nice-to-have” tools and ingredients that accompany some of the more advanced or uncommon decorating methods introduced in “15 Bottom-to-Top Decorating Techniques” (p. 27). “Beyond Bedazzled” (p. 48) brings up the rear, but does so boldly with information about 3-D cookie construction, custom cookie templates, and other decorating possibilities designed to take your cookie art to the highest level. I strongly urge you to taste these pages before you read any further and to nibble your way through in order from “Basics” to “Beyond Bedazzled.” If you do, your first crack at the projects is sure to be its sweetest.
TOOLS I CAN’T LIVE WITHOUT

You have it. I have it. We all have that special kitchen gadget or piece of equipment whose absence—even if only misplaced—provokes complete meltdown. Maybe it’s a trusty wooden spoon, a muffin tin rich with the patina of years of greasing with real butter, or a workhorse of a mixer. When it comes to cookie baking and decorating, my list of indispensable tools is short, but very particular. I call on the following few items over and over throughout the book and believe they’re essential elements in everyone’s tool kit. For a sense of how deep you may have to dig, take a look at my pricing key below. And, remember, if you’re a beginner, you can get a lot of mileage out of three inexpensive decorating tools: a parchment pastry cone, a metal trussing needle, and the handle-end of a craft paintbrush!

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1. Parchment pastry cone, aka cornet ($). I do 95 percent of my cookie detailing with this simple DIY tool, hence its top billing here as my favorite item. I prefer cones to reusable pastry bags with metal tips for most icing applications, partly because there’s nothing I dislike more than reaching into a goopy pastry bag to remove the coupler (the plastic piece that holds the tip to the bag) for cleaning. With parchment pastry cones, once you’re done, just snip off the tip, squeeze out the leftover icing, and toss out the cone. Extremely tiny holes (smaller than any pastry tip) can also be cut in cone tips, allowing for very precise decorating. Disposable plastic piping bags or baggies with holes cut in their corners can substitute for cones, though I find them flippier and harder to handle. What’s worse, they’re not biodegradable. Some decorators use squeeze bottles, but they also offer inferior control.


3. Silicone baking mats ($$). These mats can be pricey, which is why I suggest parchment paper as an alternative for lining cookie sheets, when appropriate. But, truth be told, silicone baking mats are the superior liner. They promote more even heating and browning, plus, they’re a requirement when baking very thin, delicate wafers, such as my Traditional Tuiles (p. 255). Parchment paper almost always buckles under these lightweight cookies, leading to misshapen cookies. What’s more, tuiles are harder to remove from paper without breaking.

4. Heavy-gauge aluminized steel (12 to 13 x 16- to 18-inch) jelly roll pans, for cookie sheets ($). Avoid flimsy cookie sheets whenever you can. The hett of these pans promotes more even heating and browning, and their short walls keep the pans from warping over time—God forbid you should ever throw a hot one into cold water! Better yet, their ample size fits more cookies than smaller (10 x 15-inch) jelly roll pans. I’m partial to Chicago Metallic’s very affordable commercial line of these pans, but there are many brands from which to choose.

5. Digital scale ($–$$$. You won’t need a scale to make my cookie recipes if you follow my method for measuring dry ingredients (p. 233). However, my project yields are based on dough weight, simply because weighing is far more accurate than eyeballing one-half or some other fraction of a cookie recipe. While prices for scales vary widely from brand to brand, you’ll find many inexpensive options available—and, fortunately, inexpensive is all you need for my projects.
WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

Whether they fly, leap, slither, wiggle, or crawl, the whimsical creatures in this animal kingdom are sure to find their way into your heart—and stomach. Ideal for little and big adventurers who prefer a walk on the wild side!

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Kids will delight in every inch of these playful crawlers, from the very top of their gumball heads down to their cookie bodies and licorice legs. Shape the cookies into straight or wavy lines for caterpillars or into 3-D arcs for inchworms. Or leave them in pieces and make a game of assembling them with your youngsters.

About 6 ounces (1/8 recipe) Cutout Cookie Gingerbread (p. 236) or (1/4 recipe) Signature Sugar Cookie Dough (p. 234)
Small (7/8-inch) plain round cookie cutter
About 2 3/4 cups (1/3 recipe) Royal Icing (p. 242), divided; quantity will vary
Soft-gel food colorings (p. 14) of your choice
Parchment pastry cones (p. 13)
7 to 8 (7/8-inch) gumballs (1 per caterpillar), for heads
7 to 8 wire stamens normally used for gumpaste flowers (p. 268), for antennae (optional; Note: Must remove before eating.)
7 to 8 (5/8-inch) gumballs (1 per caterpillar), for tails
About 3 (1 1/4-inch) wheels licorice lace (such as Haribo Wheels), for legs
Sugar confetti (p. 26), for eyeballs
Ground chocolate cookies, for dirt (optional)
Brownie rocks, for display (optional; see Step 7)

CATERPILLAR CAPER

KIDS WILL DELIGHT IN EVERY INCH OF THESE PLAYFUL CRAWLERS, from the very top of their gumball heads down to their cookie bodies and licorice legs. Shape the cookies into straight or wavy lines for caterpillars or into 3-D arcs for inchworms. Or leave them in pieces and make a game of assembling them with your youngsters.

Makes 7 to 8 (6- to 6 1/2-inch) caterpillars or (5 x 1 3/4- to 2 1/2-inch-tall) inchworms

TYPES:
Cutout Cookie Gingerbread (p. 236) or Signature Sugar Cookie Dough (p. 234)

PREP TALK:
While either dough, above, can be used for this project, I think these crawlers’ colors pop more against gingerbread. Be sure to mix and chill the dough as instructed. If packaged in airtight containers at room temperature, this project will stay its best about 1 week.
caterpillar caper, continued

1. Cut and bake the bodies. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to a 1/4- to 1/8-inch thickness. Cut out 7 to 8 dozen (7/8-inch) rounds and bake as directed until lightly browned around the edges, or about 7 to 9 minutes. Cool completely before decorating in Step 3.

2. Prepare the Royal Icing as instructed on page 242. Reserve about 1/4 cup for filling, 1/2 cup for “glue,” and another 1/4 cup for eyes and dots. Note: The quantity of icing will vary with the number of colors and consistencies mixed. It’s best to allow no less than 1/4 to 1/2 cup icing per color or consistency for easiest mixing and handling.

3. Top-coat the bodies. Divide the remaining 1 cup icing into as many portions as you want top-coating colors or consistencies. Transfer each portion to a separate parchment pastry cone and cut a relatively large (1/4- to 1/2-inch or more) hole in each tip. Note: You can also apply the icing with the handle-end of a craft paintbrush, as I usually do when top-coating, but it’s a little easier to control the distribution of icing on very small cookies with a pastry cone.

(a) Pipe enough icing on the top of each round cookie to smoothly top-coat it. Since each caterpillar body will be comprised 10 to 12 rounds, assembled into 5 or 6 sandwich cookies or segments, I like to ice cookies in sets of 10 to 12, with each set in a single color.

(b) While the icing is still wet, set a large (1/4-inch) gum-ball on top of 7 to 8 cookies to make heads; then, as desired, fold gum paste flower stamens in half and slip one behind each gum-ball to make antennae. Also stick smaller (1/2-inch) gum-balls into another 7 to 8 cookies to create tails. Let the icing dry completely before proceeding to the next step.

4. Fill the bodies to make segments. Start by prepping the licorice legs by unwinding the licorice rolls and cutting them into 1/4- to 1-inch lengths. You’ll need 2 pieces for each caterpillar segment or about 10 to 12 pieces for each caterpillar. Tint the 1/4 cup icing reserved for filling to a color (or colors) of your choice. Thin to thick top-coating consistency. Transfer each color to a separate parchment pastry cone and cut a relatively large (1/4-inch or more) hole in each tip.

(c) Turn half of the cookies in each set over and pipe a small mound of icing on the back of each one. Insert 2 pieces of licorice on either side of the icing so they stick out beyond the sides of the cookies; then quickly cap each icing mound with one of the remaining cookies in the set to make a sandwich, pressing just until the icing squeezes to the cookie edges but no further. (If the icing runs over the cookie edges, thicken it to outlining consistency with powdered sugar.) Dry completely.

5. Assemble the segments into caterpillars (and inch-worms). I typically like to assemble my crawlers 5- to 6-segments long, including a segment with a gum-ball head and another with a gum-ball tail. But feel free to make them as long or short as you like.

(c) While the icing is still wet, set a large (1/4-inch) gum-ball on top of 7 to 8 cookies to make heads; then, as desired, fold gum paste flower stamens in half and slip one behind each gum-ball to make antennae. Also stick smaller (1/2-inch) gum-balls into another 7 to 8 cookies to create tails. Let the icing dry completely before proceeding to the next step.

(d) Simply stick the top-coated sides of the sandwich cookies together end to end using the 1/4 cup icing reserved for "glue." Since the "glue" will ultimately be visible, it’s best to tint it to color-coordinate with the top coats. For caterpillars, assemble the segments in a flat "walking position." As needed, prop segments with gum-balls with other cookies or small objects. (These segments are top heavy and tend to flop off until the icing is dry.)

6. Add eyes and other details. While the crawlers are drying, affix sugar confetti to each head for eyeballs using the leftover "glue." Tint the remaining 1/4 cup icing to a color (or colors) of your choice and thin to beadwork consistency (p. 245). Use it to pipe pupils on the eyeballs and dots on the crawlers’ backs and feet. Any leftover icing from Steps 3 and 4 can also be used for this purpose.

Do not move the crawlers until completely dry, and always handle carefully using a large spatula underneath for support.

7. Display (optional) and serve. Present on ground cookie crumb dirt with brownie rocks, as desired. Note: Inchworms are most easily propped with crumbs. A (14/1-ounce) box chocolate cookies makes about 3 1/2 cups crumbs. For rocks, bake Basic or Blonde Brownies (p. 247) in 8 x 8 x 2-inch pans and cut into small chunks. Also, don’t forget: Tell guests to remove any wire antennae before eating.
WHAT SWEETER DRESS-UPS FOR YOUR LITTLE PRINCESS than these completely edible necklaces strung on licorice lace? They look ornate, but require nothing more than a cookie stencil (or silicone mold for the Cameo Appearance Variation) and a treasure trove of store-bought dragées and sugar gems.

Types:
Cutout Cookie Gingerbread (p. 236) or Signature Sugar Cookie Dough (p. 234)

Made in the USA (p. 14) and other soft-gel food colorings (p. 14) of your choice
Small craft paintbrush (handle about ¼-inch diameter)
Decorative stencil(s) (p. 24), sized to fit 2- to 4-inch cookie cutters, above
Small offset spatula (p. 14)
Gold and/or silver luster dust or other decorating powder (p. 27, optional)
A few teaspoons clear extract, for painting (optional)
Parchment pastry cones (p. 13)

Stand-in: Stenciled Stack. Even if you don’t string the stenciled cookies onto licorice lace, they’ll look regal on a lovely plate.
tip-top topiary

A CHARMING ADDITION TO ANY SPRINGTIME PARTY, these topiaries tempt with two cookie types—iced cookies on top and brownies nestled in the pots. My take, below, stands 6 to 7 inches tall—a perfect size for a place card or favor. But you can also scale these trees up or down to suit your fancy.

Makes about 8 (13⁄4 x 21⁄8 x 67⁄8-inch-tall) topiaries

About 11 ounces (1⁄4 recipe) Cutout Cookie Gingerbread (p. 236) or (1⁄4 recipe) Signature Sugar Cookie Dough (p. 234)
12-piece fluted round cookie cutter set (Ateco #5407, p. 14)
About 2 1⁄4 cups (1⁄4 to 1⁄2 recipe) Royal Icing (p. 242), divided
Green and other soft-gel food colorings (p. 14) of your choice
Small craft paintbrush (handle about 1⁄4-inch diameter)
Pastry bag fitted with 1⁄4-inch leaf tip (Ateco #352)
About 4 dozen readymade small (3⁄8- to 3⁄4-inch) royal icing daisies or roses (p. 61; 6 flowers per topiary)
Parchment pastry cones (p. 13)
8 (8-inch) cardboard lollypop sticks (p. TK; 1 per topiary)
16 small (1⁄2- to 3⁄4-inch) Loop-de-Loop Bows (p. 57; 2 per topiary, optional)
1⁄2 recipe Basic or Blonde Brownies (p. 247)
Silicone brownie pop or other baking mold (p. 24; also see Step 6)
About 8 ounces rolled fondant (p. 53) or other modeling medium, color(s) of your choice, for wrapping flower pots

Stand-in: Macaroon Mania. French macaroons (aka macaroons) are all the rage. And there’s no reason you, too, can’t jump on the bandwagon—and save some time—with this project! Skip the iced cookies, pictured left, and simply sandwich pairs of green-tinted Goofproof Macaroons with Ganache or Italian Buttercream around lollypop sticks. Tied with real ribbons and name tags, they make pretty favors sans brownie pots. Note: To firm up the buttercream and keep the sandwiches in place, briefly chill the macaroon sticks before serving.

Types:
Cutout Cookie Gingerbread (p. 236) or Signature Sugar Cookie Dough (p. 234) for topiary rounds;
Basic or Blonde Brownies (p. 247) for flower pots
Tired of the typical gingerbread house? Then skip it this year and turn your holiday showpiece into this way cool gingerbread sleigh instead. Drawn by a retinue of cookie reindeer and stuffed with (yes, you guessed it) cookie gifts, penguins, and a Christmas tree, it’s even cooler.

Custom sleigh template (p. 267)
Ruler or custom rectangular template, for sleigh supports (see Step 1)
About 2 pounds 10 ounces (7/4 to 1 recipe) Cutout Cookie Gingerbread (p. 236; Note: About 17/4 pounds dough is used for the 4 sleighs alone.)
Large (5 1/2 x 6- to 6 1/2-inch) reindeer cookie cutter
6-cutter plain square cookie cutter set (Ateco #5253, p. 14), for gifts
Assorted (1 1/2 - to 5-inch) Christmas cookie cutters (such as trees and penguins), for filling sleighs
1 1/4-inch plain round cookie cutter, for reindeer pedestals (optional)
About 6 1/4 cups (11/4 to 1 1/4 recipes) Royal Icing (p. 242), divided; quantity will vary
Brown and other soft-gel food colorings (p. 14) of your choice
Parchment pastry cones (p. 13)
Assorted (3 to 6 mm) dragées or sugar beads (p. 26)
Assorted small (1/2- to 1 1/4-inch) readymade royal icing and sugar embellishments (such as poinsettia, cardinals, and penguins, p. TK), for decorating sleighs and reindeer

Sleigh cool

Makes about 2 (3 1/8 x 6 x 7/8-inch-tall) sleighs, plus reindeer and assorted cookies to fill sleighs

Stand-in: Props to Powdered Sugar. Powdered sugar is of course essential to Royal Icing, but did you know that it can also be a timesaver in cookie displays? Here it props a simple 2-D sleigh, allowing the 3-D assembly in Step 5 (p. 212) to be skipped! As for the sleigh cargo? It’s standing in a glass of powdered sugar hidden behind the sleigh.

Types:
Cutout Cookie Gingerbread (p. 236), or Construction Gingerbread (p. 238) just for sleighs;
Signature Sugar Cookie Dough (p. 236) just for small pieces
A FLURRY OF SNOWFLAKE CONFETTI, sanding sugar, and nonpareils adds sparkle to these fun yuletide favors. You can make your own Royal Icing figures for the central vignettes or, to avoid the holiday rush, use readymade decorations as pictured left.

**snow globes**

WITH NAME DROPPER VARIATION

Makes 6 (2 1/2 to 2 5/8 x 4 1/2-inch-tall) snow globes

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<td>PREP TALK:</td>
<td>Either dough, above, works well for this small-scale 3-D construction project. Just be sure to prep the dough as instructed. If packaged in airtight containers at room temperature, this project will stay its best about 1 week.</td>
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**Yuletide Yummies**

- About 1 pound 5 ounces (1/2 recipe) Cutout Cookie Gingerbread (p. 236) or (1 recipe) Signature Sugar Cookie Dough (p. 234)
- 12-piece fluted round cookie cutter set (Ateco #5407, p. 14)
- 12-piece plain round cookie cutter set (Ateco #5457, p. 14)
- About 3 cups (2/3 recipe) Royal Icing (p. 242), divided; quantity will vary
- Soft-gel food colorings (p. 14) of your choice
- Small craft paintbrush (handle about 1/4-inch diameter)
- Parchment pastry cones (p. 13)
- A few tablespoons sanding sugar, nonpareils, and/or edible glitter (p. 26)
- Assorted small (1/2- to 1 1/4-inch) readymade royal icing embellishments (such as santas, snowmen, penguins, and Christmas trees, p. T6), for central vignettes
- Snowflake Sugar confetti (p. 26)
- Assorted (2 to 3 mm) dragées or sugar beads (p. 26)
- Pastry bag fitted with tip of your choice, for borders