

# Curious Cookies

BY EAGRANIE YUH

PHOTOS BY BARBARA CAMERON

**H**ERE'S HOW MOST CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE RECIPES GO: In a mixing bowl, cream sugar and butter until light and fluffy. Dribble in eggs and vanilla. In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Fold the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients, then sprinkle in chocolate chips, and stir just to combine. Drop identical dollops of cookie dough onto a baking sheet, leaving gaps between neighbours. Bake into perfectly golden-brown cookies, evenly studded with chocolate chips.

Here's my mom's method for making cookies: In a saucepan, melt margarine and sugar. Crack in an egg, and stir furiously to minimize scrambling. Dump in a mixture of whole wheat flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Toss in a few handfuls of miniature carob chips, then mix roughly until the batter comes together. Slap the batter onto an ungreased cookie sheet, glossing over instructions like "place the cookies two inches apart," and bake one enormous frankencookie that covers the entire pan. Snap off the blackened edges, and divide it into rough squares.





I was the only kid at school with square cookies, but it didn't bother me. I didn't know that butter and margarine have different properties, that whole wheat flour can make baked goods dense and heavy, or the difference between creaming and melting the fat. And I certainly didn't know that carob is a legume masquerading as chocolate.

For every recipe that begins with "cream the butter and sugar," there's someone who looks confused. It simply means to mix the butter and sugar vigorously until light and fluffy, but it might as well be secret code, because there's no way for you to figure that out. By creaming, you incorporate air, thereby creating a lighter, fluffier cookie.

When my mom melted, rather than creamed, the margarine and sugar, she set things up for flat, dense cookies. Even worse, the melted margarine resulted in a warm, fluid batter that gave the cookies no choice but to smooch together as they baked into a crisp, carob chip pancake.

Hydrogenated vegetable fats—like margarine and shortening—lead to crisper, crumblier cookies with little flavour. When it comes to chocolate chip, I prefer butter. Aside from being tasty, it yields cookies that spread slightly when baked, leading to crispy edges and soft centres. So why did she use margarine?

In the '80s there was a backlash against saturated fats. Consumption of red meat plummeted, prompting pork to advertise itself as "the other white meat." Sales of skinless, boneless chicken breasts shot through the roof. And well-meaning people, like my mom, eschewed butter in favour of margarine. Not just any margarine—hard margarine, sold in bricks, full of trans fatty acids that have since been linked to heart disease. Whoops.

While she was substituting margarine for butter, my mom also swapped out all-purpose flour for whole wheat. Whole wheat flour, as the name suggests, is milled from the entire wheat grain, and so contains the bran, germ, and endosperm. All that added stuff can throw off the balance of dry and wet ingredients in a recipe, so simply substituting whole wheat for all-purpose flour can be risky. Dry, crumbly cookies weren't the only result; I also ate my share of hockey puck muffins.

Finally, let's be clear: carob is not chocolate. It's a legume. In some countries, carob is a legitimate food, used as a sweetener and in hot drinks. When I was growing up, carob was faux chocolate, synonymous with health-conscious hippies. It came from a bulk food store that smelled like stale spices, and it tasted like dirt—with a hint of cumin and coriander, its common neighbours in the bulk food section.

To this day, my mom hates to cook, and baking mystifies her. Still, my childhood memories are punctuated with a steady stream of



square chocolate chip cookies. When I was small, my mom sat me on the kitchen counter while she made them. From my perch, I stared intently at the kitchen floor, lost in the kaleidoscope of orange, brown, and avocado blotches on the linoleum.

One day, I was old enough to unwrap the pre-portioned bricks of margarine from their waxed paper. And when I could see above the counter, we made square cookies together. I remember scraping a spoon across the bottom of the saucepan, the crunch of the sugar, the smell of the margarine. Those cookies may have broken all the rules, but to me, they were perfect.

*Eagranie Yuh cannot believe that she spent the formative years of her life eating carob. Learn more about the real stuff at one of her chocolate-tasting classes: [thewelltemperedchocolatier.com](http://thewelltemperedchocolatier.com)*

*Food photographer Barbara Cameron and stylist Sonora Wallace love working together in a simply delicious profession. [barbaracameronpix.com](http://barbaracameronpix.com)*

*Editor's note: many thanks to the MOV (Museum of Vancouver) for hosting our retro cookies photo shoot.*



## SNEAKY WHOLE WHEAT CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

These handsome cookies are crispy on the outside, chewy on the inside, and full of melty chocolate goodness. You'd never guess they contain whole wheat flour, which lends a pleasant chewiness and nuttiness, without being heavy or dense.

Patience is a virtue, especially where these cookies are involved. First, to avoid scrambled eggs, make sure your butter-sugar mixture has cooled to room temperature before you add the eggs. Second, chill the cookie batter for at least two hours before baking, to give the butter enough time to re-solidify. And if you are saintly enough to wait for the dough to rest overnight, the cookies are even better.

Makes 24 cookies.

- ½ cup (114g) butter
- ¾ cup (150g) brown sugar
- ¼ cup (55g) granulated sugar
- ¾ cup (95g) all-purpose flour
- ½ cup (80g) whole wheat flour
- ¾ teaspoon (4g or 3mL) baking powder
- ½ teaspoon (2g or 2mL) baking soda
- ½ teaspoon (2g or 2mL) salt
- 1 egg
- ¾ teaspoon (3g or 3mL) vanilla
- 3 oz (81g) dark chocolate (70–80% cocoa solids), coarsely chopped

In a medium saucepan, heat butter and both sugars over medium-low heat. Stir occasionally until the butter melts. Remove from heat and set aside for 15 minutes, or until the mixture cools to room temperature.

In a medium bowl, combine all-purpose flour, whole wheat flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and chocolate. Set aside.

When the butter-sugar mixture is room temperature, add the egg and vanilla. (CAUTION: if the butter-sugar mixture is still warm, you will cook your eggs.) Using a spatula, stir to incorporate. Add the flour mixture and stir just until there are no flecks of flour remaining. Transfer the batter to a sheet of plastic wrap, wrap tightly, and chill in the refrigerator until firm, at least 2 hours, and preferably overnight.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease two cookie sheets, or line them with parchment.

Break off teaspoon-sized pieces of dough and roll them into balls, allowing at least 10cm between nearest neighbours. Flatten each ball to a thickness of 1.5cm. Bake for 12–14 minutes until golden brown on top. Let the cookies cool for one minute on the cookie sheet, then transfer to a cooling rack.

Note: Refrigerated cookie dough will keep for three days. Alternatively, you can bake and cool all the cookies, then freeze the extras.