

thumbprint cookies

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Thumbprint Cookies

A shortbread ball with a well pressed into it and jam or ganache set in the well. Swedish bakers call them *hallongrottor* — raspberry caves — and the Scandinavian version is the honest one: butter, sugar, flour, and nothing else holding the biscuit together, so it is entirely a shortbread problem.

The two failures are universal and both are about the well. It closes as the cookie spreads, or it cracks into fissures that let the jam run out.

What makes it work

- **Press twice.** Once before baking, and again 6–8 minutes in when the dough is hot and pliable. The second press reopens the well the spread has closed and is the single technique that separates a good thumbprint from a domed cookie with a red spot on it.
- **Press with a rounded handle, not a thumb.** A 1 cm measuring-spoon back or the end of a wooden spoon gives a clean hemisphere. A thumb splits the edge.
- **Chill the shaped balls 30 minutes.** Cracking at the rim is a temperature problem: warm dough tears rather than compresses.
- **Cook the jam down before it goes in, or use a thick preserve.** Loose jam boils, foams over the rim and hardens into a lacquer on the tray. A jam reduced with 2 g of pectin-rich apple purée or simply simmered five minutes sets in the well instead. See [Fruit Jellies Jam Jellies Butters](#).

Ingredients

Makes about 30.

- 225 g unsalted butter, softened
- 100 g granulated sugar
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 tsp vanilla — see [Pure vanilla extract](#)
- 280 g all-purpose flour
- 3 g fine salt
- 150 g thick jam, or 150 g ganache
- optional coating: 1 egg white and 120 g finely chopped [walnuts](#)

Method

Cream the butter and sugar until pale, about three minutes, then beat in the yolks and vanilla. Fold in the flour and salt to a soft, non-sticky dough.

Roll 18 g balls. For the nut-crusted version, roll each in beaten egg white and then in chopped nuts. Set them on parchment, press a well into each, and chill 30 minutes.

Bake **175 °C / 350 °F for 14–16 minutes**. At the 7-minute mark pull the tray and press each well again, firmly. Fill the wells with jam while the cookies are still hot, using a piping bag or a small spoon, and return them to the oven for the last four minutes if you want the jam set firm.

Cool completely on the tray — the biscuit has no egg white and no gluten network to speak of, and it is fragile until the butter has firmed.

Notes

- **Ganache instead of jam** goes in after baking, not before: 100 g chopped dark chocolate over 100 g hot cream, stirred smooth, spooned into cooled wells. See [Chocolates](#).
- Lemon curd works but weeps in the fridge; fill those the day they are eaten. See [lemon](#).
- The same dough is the basis of [russian tea cakes](#) with nuts added and no well at all.

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