

*Celebrating with*

*Alyson Justine Dorr*



Photography by Jeremiah and Rachel Photography

**ALYSON DORR** lives on a small multi-generational family farm nestled in the beautiful mountains of Montana's Flathead Valley. Alongside her husband and siblings, she is working to preserve the heritage, values, and lifestyle of her childhood for the next generation of farm kids.

**T**he farm is a family affair. There are four generations of us living on the land. My siblings and their spouses and kids live and work here too. We all help fix fences and work cows- albeit we would be lost without my dad, the real farmer and boss man. It is a wonderful, beautiful, and full life where my children play in the same places I did at their age: exploring the wild woods, swimming in the pond and catching frogs with their cousins who live just across the field. They enjoy an idyllic childhood and enormous freedom, although it comes with responsibility and hard work. So, whether it is in the kitchen cooking, feeding animals, driving the hay wagon, or collecting eggs – my girls are also learning to pull their weight and contribute as part of our family. And while farming is often a struggle with daily challenges, there are many rewards. None less important than the ability to grow one's own, high quality food.



Food is full circle for us. We start with seeds. We start in the pasture. Growing good food takes patience and grit. It takes time. It requires hope and prayer. Even as a child I understood the weather could make or break our crop. The little lamb curled up in the box by the wood stove needed a miracle. And I also understood that eventually the colorful plants and the livestock in the pasture would make their way to the table, sacrificing their lives to nourish mine. And so thanking God for the meal had more than ritual significance. There was no pretty package or brightly lit grocery store to disconnect me from the source, and



*Under the stars of the Big Sky and in the shadow of our mountain, we make our way around the perimeter of the farm, by the woods to Grandma's house where she has cups of hot chocolate and bowls of warm soup made, and where come Christmas Eve we will feast on a roast, read the Christmas story and remember once again the abundant miracle of hope.*

**Gingerbread & Peppermint Whoopie Pies**

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for that I am truly thankful. So when, as a child, I helped wrap the meat for the freezer, weeded the peppermint, milked the goats, or dug potatoes—food and food production became part of who I am in the same manner that going to church on Sunday held its sway: it is both my heritage and something I've made my own. I don't take it for granted that I live in a place that can feed my family and yours as well. It is a responsibility and an honor.

The kitchen is at the heart of my home. It is where we gather together as a family—to find comfort, nourishment and togetherness. It is where we dream and discuss. It is where you will find our family story. Both girls have helped in the kitchen since they were big enough to sit on the counter with a wooden spoon in hand. Now, at 9 and 11 they are totally capable of whipping together a full meal that extends far beyond a peanut butter sandwich or boxed something or other. Cooking is mostly about confidence, a virtue I've worked hard to instill in my young girls, and one I would say is most easily acquired while the apron strings drag the floor and you are eye level with a feeder hog. Around here we hold to my Pop's saying, "Make yourself useful as well as ornamental"—encouraging the kids to join in, to take a risk. Participation leads to a sense of belonging. It was really my grandmother who taught me to cook. At 90, she remains the master, gently passing on her craft to her great-granddaughters. They are learning to cook as I did; often leaving behind the recipe card and adding by taste and interest, experimenting as they go.

### Christmas Buckeyes

As a little girl I loved helping my grandma roll out hundreds of these sweet candies in preparation for Christmas. I've modified her recipe slightly, but it retains the same delicious, creamy chocolate-peanut butter flavor. This recipe makes a lot—about 200 candies, but is simple to cut in half.

- 2 lbs creamy peanut butter (switch it up with almond butter)**
- 3 lbs powdered sugar (about 12 cups)**
- 1 lb unsalted butter, softened**
- 12 oz dark chocolate melting wafers**
- 6 oz semi-sweet chocolate chips**
- 2 Tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder**

Combine ingredients in the bowl of a stand mixer and roll into small balls. Chill for 15 min. In a double-boiler on low, melt together: chocolate wafers, chocolate chips and cocoa powder. Remove from heat. Put a toothpick in each chilled ball and dip into melted chocolate so  $\frac{3}{4}$  of ball is covered. Twist slightly to drip excess chocolate and place on parchment or wax paper to set.

### Gingerbread & Peppermint Whoopie Pies

This recipe is my daughters' favorite holiday treat. They love to bake and assemble the cookies with me, and insist the eater exclaims "whoopie" in praise.

For the best flavor, avoid peppermint extract and use real, food grade oil instead. Be careful though—essential oil will be stronger than imitation flavors so don't over do it. We love to use our farm-grown, Montana peppermint oil as it really does add the fresh taste we are looking for—our oil is available in limited quantities at [www.montanaredbarn.com](http://www.montanaredbarn.com). This recipe is easy to modify for you wheat-eaters too simply replace flour with regular and use a large egg.

#### COOKIE

- 3 cup gluten-free flour blend (I use Namaste)**
- 2 tsp ground ginger**
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon**

- 1 tsp baking soda**
- $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp ground nutmeg**
- $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp sea salt**
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup +  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup unsalted butter, softened**
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup brown sugar**
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup molasses**
- 1 extra large egg**
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup organic sugar (for rolling balls of dough in)**

#### FILLING

- 1 jar (7 oz) marshmallow cream**
- 4 oz cream cheese, softened**
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup powdered sugar**
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp Pure, 100% Peppermint oil (or food-safe peppermint oil of choice)**

#### EDGING

- 1 cup crushed peppermint candies or candy canes**

1. Mix flour, ginger, cinnamon, baking soda, nutmeg and salt in a medium bowl, set aside. Beat  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of butter and brown sugar in a large bowl with a stand mixer on medium speed until light. Add molasses and egg, and whip it up baby! Reduce speed. Gradually beat in flour mixture until well mixed. Press dough into a thick disk and wrap in plastic. Refrigerate 4 hours or overnight.
2. Shape chilled dough into 1-inch balls (or smaller if desired). Roll in sugar. Place 2 inches apart on parchment lined baking sheet.
3. Bake at 350 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes or until edges of cookies start to brown. Remove to wire racks and cool completely.
4. Mix marshmallow cream,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup butter, and cream cheese until well blended. Add in powdered sugar until filling holds shape. Add Peppermint oil, adjusting amount as desired for flavor, and mix well. Add about 1 tablespoon of filling on flat side of one cookie, pressing a second cookie on top gently. Roll edge of cookie in chopped candy and repeat. Cheerfully exclaim "whoopie". Makes about 2.5 dozen.

**Make it your own**—roll cookies in mini chocolate chips or crushed nuts for a fun twist.



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