The History of the Girl Scout Cookie

girl scouts
cookie program

The Early Years

Girl Scout Cookies had their earliest beginnings in the kitchens and ovens of our girl members, with mothers volunteering as technical advisers. The sale of cookies as a way to finance Girl Scout Troop activities began as early as 1917, five years after Juliette Gordon Low started Girl Scouting in the United States.

The earliest mention of a Cookie Program found to date was that of the Mistletoe Girl Scout Troop in Muskogee, Oklahoma, which baked cookies and sold them in its high school cafeteria as a Girl Scout service project in December 1917.

In July 1922, The American Girl magazine, published by Girl Scout national headquarters, featured an article by Florence E. Neil, a local director in Chicago, Illinois. Miss Neil provided a cookie recipe that was given to her Girl Scout council's 2,000 Girl Scouts. She estimated the approximate cost of ingredients for six-to seven-dozen cookies to be 26 to 36 cents. The cookies, she suggested, could be sold by Girl Scout Troops for 25 or 30 cents per dozen.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Girl Scouts in different parts of the country continued to bake their own simple sugar cookies with their mothers. These cookies were packaged in wax paper bags, sealed with a sticker, and sold door to door for 25 to 35 cents per dozen.

THE EARLY GIRL SCOUT COOKIE RECIPE

1 cup butter
1 cup sugar plus additional amount for topping (optional)
2 eggs
2 tablespoons milk
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups flour
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder

Cream butter and the cup of sugar; add well-beaten eggs, then milk, vanilla, flour, salt, and baking powder. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Roll dough, cut into trefoil shapes, and sprinkle sugar on top, if desired. Bake in a quick oven (375°) for approximately 8 to 10 minutes or until the edges begin to brown. Makes six- to seven-dozen cookies.

The 1930's

In 1933, Girl Scouts of Greater Philadelphia Council baked cookies and sold them in the city's gas and electric company windows. Just 23 cents per box of 44 cookies, or six boxes for $1.24 helped Girl Scouts develop their marketing and business potential and raise funds for their local Girl Scout council program. In 1934, Greater Philadelphia became the first council to sell commercially baked cookies.
In 1935, another large group, the Girl Scout Federation of Greater New York (consisting of the Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island councils) raised money through the sale of commercial cookies. Buying its own die in the shape of the Girl Scout Trefoil, the group used the words "Girl Scout Cookies" on the box.
In 1936, the national Girl Scout organization began the process to license the first commercial baker to produce Girl Scout Cookies that would be sold by girls in Girl Scout councils. Enthusiasm for Girl Scout Cookies spread nationwide. In 1937, more than 125 Girl Scout councils reported holding Girl Scout Cookie Programs.

The1940's

The Girl Scout Cookie Program was an annual event around the country until World War II, when sugar, flour, and butter shortages led Girl Scouts to begin selling Girl Scout calendars to learn the valuable business and economic skills learned through the Cookie Program and raise money for their Girl Scout Troop activities.

The Girl Scout Cookie Program continued annually, with the national organization licensing local bakers to produce and package the Girl Scout Cookies. By 1948, a total of 29 bakers throughout the nation were licensed to bake Girl Scout Cookies.

The 1950's

In 1951, Girl Scout Cookies came in three varieties: Sandwich, Shortbread, and Chocolate Mints (now known as the famous Thin Mint). With the advent of the suburbs, Girl Scout Cookies were also sold by girls at tables in shopping malls. By 1956, Girl Scouts sold four basic types of Girl Scout Cookies: a vanilla-based filled cookie, a chocolate-based filled one, shortbread, and a chocolate mint. Some bakers also offered an optional flavor.

The 1960's

During the 1960s, when baby boomers expanded Girl Scout membership, cookie volume increased significantly. In 1961, 14 licensed bakers were mixing batter for thousands upon thousands of Girl Scout Cookies annually.

In 1960, licensed bakers first began wrapping Girl Scout Cookie boxes in printed aluminum foil or cellophane to protect the Girl Scout Cookies and preserve their freshness. By 1966, a number of varieties were available. Among the best sellers were Chocolate Mint, Shortbread, and Peanut Butter Sandwich cookies.

The 1970's

In 1978, the number of bakeries was streamlined to four to ensure lower prices and uniform quality, packaging, and distribution. The national organization, Girl Scouts of the USA, began supplying licensed bakers with a standard Girl Scout Cookie package layout and pictures. For the first time in history, all Girl Scout Cookie boxes featured the same designs and depicted scenes of Girl Scouts in action, including hiking and canoeing. Girl Scout Cookies included the Thin Mint, Sandwich, and Shortbread cookies and four additional choices. In 1979, the new contemporary Girl Scout logo appeared on Girl Scout Cookie boxes. Cookie packaging became more creative and began to promote the benefits of Girl Scouting.

The 1980's

In 1982, the four bakers produced a maximum of seven varieties of cookies—three mandatory (Thin Mint, Sandwich, and Shortbread) and four optional ones. Packaging continued to depict scenes of Girl Scouts in action. In 1984, some of the licensed bakers started to produce gift samplings of Girl Scout Cookies in special decorative tins.

The 1990's

In the early 1990s, two licensed bakers supplied Girl Scout Cookies. Eight varieties are now available, including low fat and sugar-free selections. In 1998, Girl Scouts of the USA licensed three bakers to produce cookies. The national organization also introduced official age-appropriate awards for Girl Scout Brownie, Junior, Cadette and Seniors for participating in Cookie Program activities, including an annual Girl Scout Cookie Activity Pin, with requirements featured in an activity guide.

Today

Girl Scout Cookie boxes are bold and bright and capture the spirit of Girl Scouting. The licensed bakers produce a maximum of eight varieties, including three mandatory ones (Thin Mint, Peanut Butter Sandwich, and Shortbread). All cookies are kosher.