

# That's not how cookies are made!

by

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The big red nose peeked around the corner. Wiggling ears and antlers followed. Mrs. Claus chuckled as she beckoned Rudolph to come in.

"Rudolph, what are you doing sneaking around in here while I'm trying to cook?" Mrs. Claus asked. Rudolph thought she looked very stately and a lot like Mrs. Barbara Bush, the former first lady. She had gray hair and was very grandmotherly in her looks and her ways. Her children were the nine reindeer and Rudolph was her favorite.

Rudolph's red nose lit up and it twitched noticeably. He smiled sheepishly and asked, "How did you know it was me?"

"Your brightly lit red nose gave you away," she said laughing.

"Darned ol' nose," he said and wiggled his ears. "It always gives me away. However, don't get me wrong, I love my nose. Without it," he smiled brightly, "I wouldn't get to guide the reindeer every year." He came farther into the kitchen and said, "I was just passing by and I saw you in the kitchen so I thought I'd stop in and see what you were doing."

"I'm getting ready to make some cookies," she said and wiped her floured hands on her apron.

"I was hoping that you were going to make something good to eat, like Reindeer stew," he said and blushed. "It's my favorite, you know. I like it better than cookies."

"Sorry," Mrs. Claus said, "I know how much you like that stew, but this is something special that I'm doing for Santa. Santa loves chocolate chip cookies and I'm going to make them just for him. He's wrapping presents upstairs with the elves and I'm making them as a surprise. So, it's a secret. Please don't say anything to him or any of the other reindeer."

"You're making a surprise for Santa?" Rudolph asked and shook his antlers. "Then, are you going to make me some stew?" he asked pleadingly.

"I promise to make your stew after I finish what I'm doing, but right now while Santa is busy I'm going to make cookies for him to eat on Christmas Eve. I always make him special cookies to eat before he leaves to deliver the presents." Mrs. Claus smiled at Rudolph and she reached up and brushed her hair back out of her eyes. "I hope that Santa likes these cookies as much as he did last year."

"Why wouldn't he like them the same?" Rudolph asked with a puzzled expression.

"Because I'm going to try a different recipe."

"Isn't that a little risky?"

"Maybe, but the recipe isn't that much different, so I'm confident that Santa will like these. I got it off of the Internet and it had over a hundred four and five-star reviews."

"If he loved the cookies that you made last year, why would you take a chance and change the recipe?"

"The only reason is that all the reviewers said how good they were."

"What if they're wrong?"

"I'll taste them after I make them and make sure that they taste good. He likes them chewy and not hard."

"Well," Rudolph said. "I'm going to sneak off and see what the other reindeer are doing. I'll come back later and see how things are going."

"Okay, but remember what I told you, don't say anything about the cookies."

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"Oh drat," Mrs. Claus said to herself. "These cookies don't taste good and they're hard. Maybe, I did something wrong?" Why didn't they turn out as good as all the reviewers said that they did, she wondered.

As she stood contemplating what to do, she heard a noise in the living room. Oh no, she thought, I hope that's not Santa. She tiptoed over to the door and peeked out. There stood Rudolph with his red nose staring at the Christmas tree that Santa had put up.

"What are you doing back here?" she asked and expected an answer. Rudolph hopped up and down like a drunken kangaroo and looked down at the floor.

"I came back to see how the cookies turned out and to see if you made my stew yet."

Mrs. Claus smiled at Rudolph and said, "Sometimes you act just like a kid. I guess that's why I like you. You're my favorite reindeer."

Rudolph blushed and his eyes fluttered. "I like you and Santa an awful lot too," he admitted. "I especially like the stew that you make. It makes my mouth water just thinking about it." He opened his mouth and saliva drooled from his lips. Mrs. Claus grabbed a paper towel and cleaned his face. "Now, what's the real reason that you came back?" she asked.

"I'll be honest with you," Rudolph confessed. "The real reason I came back was to go over the cookie recipe with you. I saw what you were using and I think you may not have been using all the ingredients you should have been using."

"I suppose you're an expert at making cookies?" she said pointedly. "Now, you're telling me that's not how cookies are made!"

"I'm not an expert," Rudolph said, "but I learned a lot from my mom, Mitzi, about making cookies when I was young."

"Did she make chocolate chip cookies?"

"Yes," he said. "My mom was a great cook and she was an expert at making reindeer stew, just like you are." His mouth started drooling again as he thought about the stew and Mrs. Claus wiped off the dribble.

"You really love the stew, don't you?"

"Oh yes," he said without hesitation and puffed out his chest. "I could eat it three meals a day."

"Well, I promise to make you a big batch later after I finish the cookies. Do any of the other eight reindeer like it as much as you do?"

"Only two others, Dasher and Comet. None of the others like it for some reason."

"Maybe it's the lingonberries," she said. "Some people don't like them. I could leave out the lingonberries and maybe the others would then like it too," she suggested.

"No, no, no," Rudolph protested and stood on his hind legs and shook his head. "It wouldn't be the same and I just know that the three of us wouldn't like it then."

"Okay," Mrs. Claus said, "I'll make it the same as always and you can invite them in as well."

"But," he protested, "then I wouldn't get as much to eat."

"Don't worry, I'll make enough for all of you." This made Rudolph excitedly happy and he started bouncing up and down. Then, he started to head towards the door, but he stopped in his tracks when he remembered why he had come back.

"Before I go tell Dasher and Comet about the stew, I want to go over the cookie recipe with you."

"Okay, then," she said with a smile. "Let's do it."

They carefully went over the recipe, one ingredient at a time. "The recipe seems to be okay," Rudolph said. "However, if I remember correctly, my mom always added oatmeal in and that may be what's missing."

"How much did she add?"

"I believe it was one and a half cups. She also used a half-teaspoon of cinnamon."

"Oh my!" Mrs. Claus exclaimed. "That would make the recipe totally different."

"I think that you should give it a try to see how they turn out."

"Santa will be upstairs for several more hours so I think I'll take your suggestion and whip up a batch."

"I'll go out and play with the other reindeer for a while and come back and see how you're doing."

"I'll get started right now on the new cookie recipe. Keep your antler's crossed that they turn out as you remember.

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When Rudolph came back into the kitchen two hours later, Mrs. Claus was standing by the stove in tears. Baked cookies were scattered all over the floor.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Oh Rudolph," she said between sobs. "The cookies didn't turn out very good and I was so upset that I threw them on the floor. They were too crisp and Santa likes them chewy. What am I going to do?"

"Let's go over all the steps you used for making the cookies. Maybe I can remember something about how my mom made them that will help. It'll be okay," he said. He went up to her and laid his head on her shoulder. "Quit crying," he said. "We'll get it figured out."

Mrs. Claus was still sniffing, but she was happy that Rudolph was going to try to help her. "Okay," she said. "Let me go through everything."

She described every step, including going over all the ingredients to make sure that she hadn't left anything out.

"Well, there are a few things that I think you may have done wrong. The flour shouldn't have been sifted. That's a no-no," he said. And, the dough should have been refrigerated for a minimum of thirty minutes before baking."

"I can't believe that you know so much about baking cookies," she said.

"My mom taught me to cook so I owe it all to her," Rudolph said proudly.

Mrs. Claus started crying and said, "You're telling me that I did almost everything wrong."

"I'm sorry," Rudolph said in a comforting voice, "I didn't mean to upset you."

"Well, I guess I might as well whip up another batch," she said between sobs.

"If it's okay with you, I can stay and help."

"Thank you," she replied. "I'd like that."

"Okay, let's just take our time and see how they turn out. Would you like to sing a song while we are doing it?" he asked.

"What do you suggest?"

"How about one of my favorites, '*Santa Claus is coming to town*'."

They sang happily and made another batch of cookies and followed Rudolph's instructions to a tee. After the cookies were finished and cooled, they tasted them. They were perfect.

"I think Santa will be very pleased with these," Mrs. Claus said and gave Rudolph a hug. "Thank you very much for your help."

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On Christmas Eve, Santa got dressed and ready to go deliver presents. He walked out through the snow to the front yard and checked over the sleigh to make sure everything was ready. All the reindeer stood watching and waiting excitedly for the trip. As she'd done every year, Mrs. Claus brought out a plate of chocolate chip cookies and a glass of milk and handed them to Santa.

"These are for you," she said and smiled. "You probably thought I'd forgotten, but I didn't forget."

Santa took a bite of a cookie and he exclaimed gleefully, "These are the best cookies that you've ever made. Where did you get the recipe?"

Mrs. Claus was ecstatic and said, "They're from a family recipe that had been lost." She winked at Rudolph as his nose grew brighter.

Rudolph's nose lit up like a candelabra at full brightness. He grinned like a young boy at Santa and Mrs. Claus. Then, he pranced around in delight and his nose lit up even brighter. He finally calmed down and asked Santa, "Can I guide the sleigh tonight?"

Santa smiled and said, "Of course, your nose is perfect for that."

Mrs. Claus gave Santa a goodbye hug and then she went over to Rudolph; gave him a hug and whispered in his ear, "Thank you for all your help. I promise to make you the biggest pot of reindeer stew that you've ever seen when you get back." That made Rudolph so excited that Santa had to calm him down.

"What did you tell him?" Santa asked.

"Just to make sure to bring you home safely to me," she fibbed.

Santa hitched up all the reindeer and then he told Mrs. Claus goodbye and shouted merrily to Rudolph to take off. As the sleigh rose in the air, Santa hollered with a deep hearty chuckling sound, "Ho-Ho-Ho."