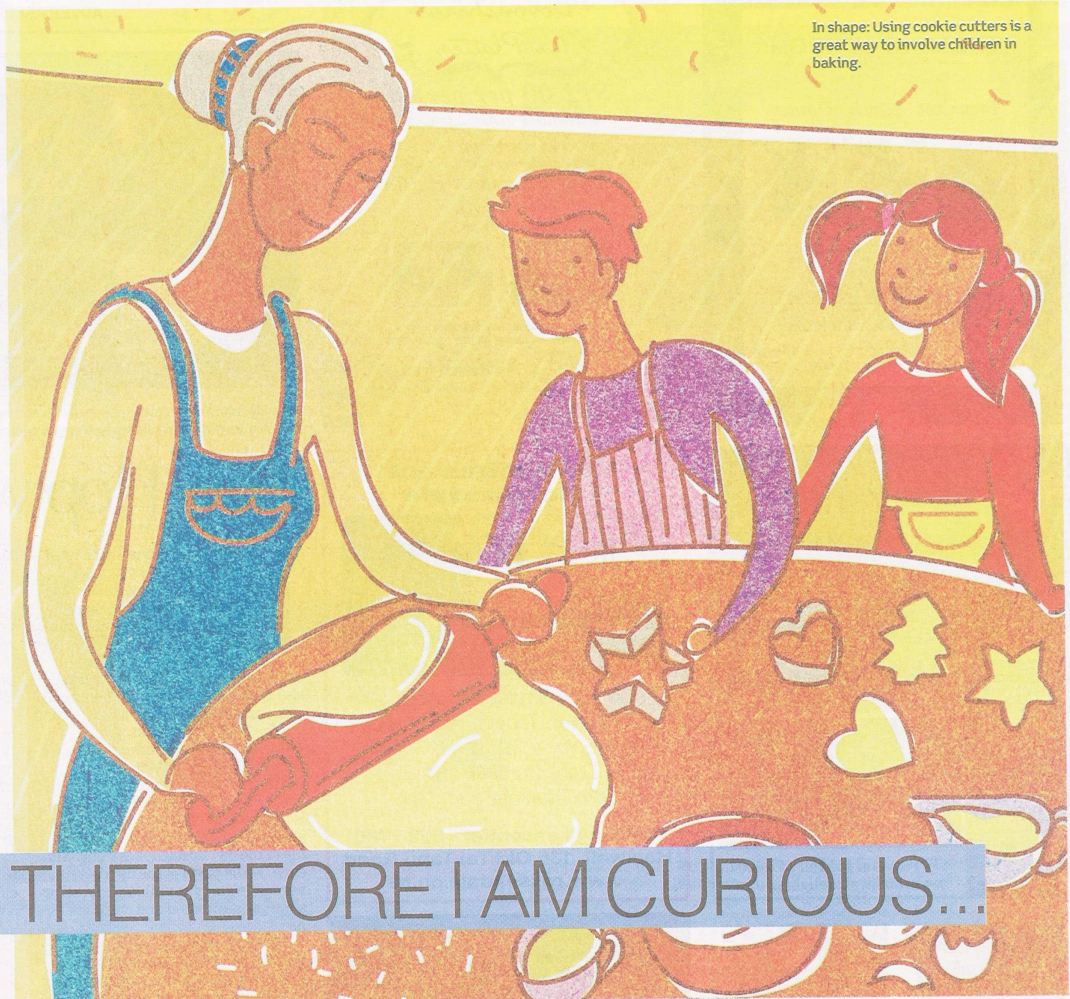


## Epicurious – Jenny Garing



**Jenny Garing**, linguist, traveller, gourmet, teacher, and the creative force behind Ground (Lyttelton) provides answers for Zest readers' culinary questions.



In shape: Using cookie cutters is a great way to involve children in baking.

## I BAKE THEREFORE I AM CURIOUS...

**Why do my biscuits spread all over the oven tray when they bake even though I am careful to spoon out only small amounts of the mix?**

This is a problem of the ratio of ingredients. It is the fat and sugar in the biscuit that melt during the cooking process, so using too much of either will cause the biscuits to spread and merge into each other. This is why it is important to weigh and measure your ingredients accurately. Also, make sure you use the kind of fat that the recipe

recommends. If the recipe calls for butter, do not try to substitute it with a soft margarine unless you adjust the other ingredients. A higher ratio of flour to fat will help the biscuits keep their shape, so approximately 300g (2 cups) of flour and 1 teaspoon baking powder, to 125g chilled diced butter and just 1 cup of brown sugar (plus an egg and any spices you want to add) should make a biscuit dough that holds together, especially if you refrigerate the dough for a couple of hours first.

**A tip for keeping your home-made biscuits crisp and fresher for longer is to put a few sugar cubes into the biscuit tin with them. The cubes absorb moisture in the tin making the environment drier.**

**Why do my cakes sometimes have air cavities, or crack and peak?**

The holes can be caused by over-mixing of the batter or even unevenly folding in the flour. When you fold in the flour the mixture should be soft. If it is too

dry pockets of air can get trapped. This can also happen if the flour and raising agent (baking powder or soda) are not sifted together thoroughly. To prevent cracking make sure you use the right-sized tin for the amount of mixture and that the oven is not too hot. Place the cake in the centre of the oven. It is hotter higher up in the oven so if the cake is there it will peak and crack. Don't despair if things do go wrong during baking. You can usually disguise it well. If the top is burnt, slice it

off and shave the sides with a potato peeler. Then warm and sieve some jam and use this to paint the surface. Alternatively, cover it in icing. If the middle of your cake sinks (often caused by opening the oven door during cooking or not having the oven hot enough) then just cut the middle of the cake out to form a ring cake instead. Spread whipped cream over the cake and fill the cavity with fresh berries.

■ Send your culinary questions to [jenny@ground.co.nz](mailto:jenny@ground.co.nz)