

The Comfort of Crows

Book Club Kit



“A howling love letter to the world.”—Ann Patchett

“Connects me more deeply to the natural world
and to my own heart.”—Dani Shapiro

Crow Cookie Recipe

Recipe by Lola Milholland, author of *Group Living and Other Recipes* (August 2024 from Spiegel & Grau)

You'll need a crow cookie cutter for this! I covered the cookies in chocolate glaze, but they're also great on their own. Something I love about this cookie recipe is that unlike other buttery cookies (and this is buttery!), you never need to chill this in the fridge, so it's very quick to put together.

Ingredients

Buckwheat Shortbread

- 1/4 cup confectioner's sugar
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes, at room temperature
- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup buckwheat flour
- 1 teaspoon salt

Chocolate Glaze

- 6 ounces semi-sweet chocolate
- 2 tablespoons rum
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Pinch of salt



Crow Cookie Recipe

Directions

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a food processor, pulse the two sugars together until combined. Add the butter and pulse until it's mixed into the sugar. Add the flours and salt and pulse until the dough comes together. It will look pebbly—that's OK!

Turn the dough onto a work surface with a little flour on it. Knead gently into a disk about 6 inches in diameter. Dust your rolling pin in flour. Roll out the dough until it's approximately 1/2-inch thick. I like to periodically lift the dough to make sure it's not sticking. If the dough is very sticky, place a sheet of parchment underneath and continue rolling.

Use your cookie cutter to cut out the crows, occasionally dipping the cutter in flour so it won't stick to the dough. Place the cookies on the parchment-lined baking sheet about 1 inch apart. Gather the scraps and reroll to cut more crows. When you have only a tiny bit of dough left, make freeform cookies, dipped in cinnamon sugar, as a prize for the baker.

Bake the cookies for 15 minutes. Rotate the baking sheet. Bake another 15 minutes or until the bottoms of the cookies are turning golden. Remove from the oven and let cool completely before you decorate with chocolate glaze. Cookies will keep for a week in an airtight container at room temperature.

For the glaze: In a double boiler over medium heat, add all the chocolate glaze ingredients and stir until the chocolate has melted. Stop right at that moment. Scrape the glaze into a broad bowl and whisk until it's smooth. As the glaze cools, it will harden, so it's easiest to spread over the cookies while it's still warm. Using a spoon or an offset spatula, place a teaspoon of glaze on each cookie and spread across the surface to cover. A little goes a long way!



Tennessee Milk Punch

So much of Margaret's book is about patient observation and curiosity, and this drink makes me think of slowing down. I envision someone taking a moment in the late afternoon to sit outside, whatever the weather, have a sip of milk punch, snack on a cookie, and take their time looking around—or reading a book!

This drink is a natural accompaniment to cookies—it plays the role milk does, cutting through the sweetness.

—Lola

Ingredients

- 3 ounces milk (dairy or unsweetened nondairy)
- 1 ounce Tennessee sipping whiskey
- 1/2 ounce maple syrup, or to taste
- 1/4 ounce dark rum
- 3/4 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Directions

- Combine the whiskey, rum, milk, vanilla, and maple syrup in a Mason jar or cocktail shaker filled with ice.
- Vigorously shake.
- Strain into a glass.
- Serve at once with crow shortbread cookies!



Margaret's Garden Photos



Beautyberry



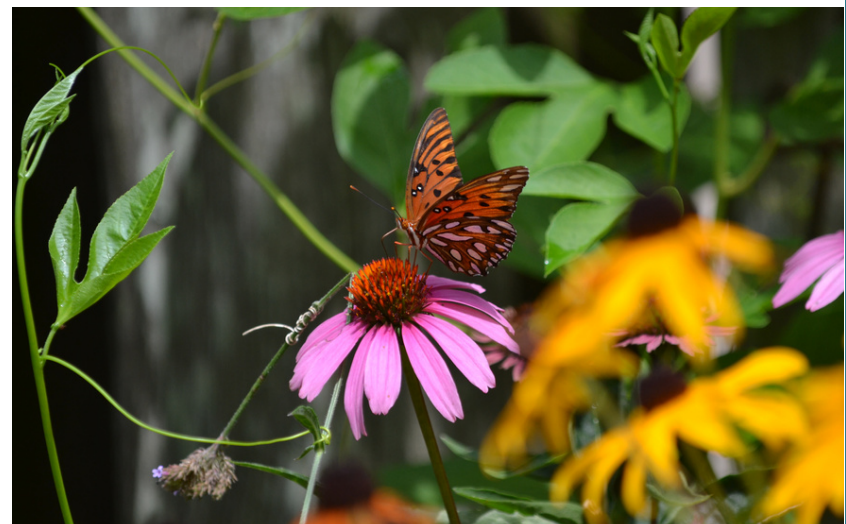
Gulf Fritillary Caterpillar



Cedar Waxwings in American Holly



Eastern Bluebirds



Gulf Fritillary Butterfly on a Purple Coneflower



Discussion Questions

1. The book opens with a New Year's game called "First Bird." If you had to choose a bird or other animal to represent this year for you, what would it be and why?
2. The book begins with two epigraphs, including one by Mary Oliver: "To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work." What does this quote mean? How does paying attention change our lives, and in what ways is it "work"?
3. Epigraphs precede many of the essays in the book. Did this add to or change your reading experience? Did you have a favorite? Why?
4. There are beautiful scenes throughout the book surrounding communities of animals (crows, bluebirds, etc) and how they behave together. What can we take away from their interactions to help us be better humans?
5. In *The Comfort of Crows*, each season ends up having its own distinct personality. Do you have a favorite season, and if so, what makes it special? Has your favorite season changed over time?
6. Throughout the book, Renkl discusses how the seasons have shifted as the effects of climate change take an increasingly large impact on the environment. What are three actions you can take to help your wild neighbors as their environment changes?



7. There are many examples of the resiliency of nature, as well as its fragility, throughout the book. What do you find to be the most surprising thing about nature? What do you think our landscape will look like ten, fifteen, or twenty years from now?

8. How do the changing seasons connect us back to previous generations?

9. Discuss how the changing seasons connect back to the seasons of life (leaving for school, coming back for the holidays or summer break, etc). What seasons do you have strong memories associated with?

10. Renkl's brother created all the art in the book. Do you have any siblings? Have you ever worked on a big project together? What do you imagine it would be like?

11. How did the art affect your reading of each chapter? Did you have a favorite? Could you always see the connection between the art and the writing?

12. What is the role of faith in the book, religious or otherwise?



Let's Keep in Touch



MARGARET RENKL is the author of *Late Migrations* and *Graceland, At Last*. She is a contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times*, where her essays appear weekly. The founding editor of *Chapter 16*, a daily literary publication of Humanities Tennessee, and a graduate of Auburn University and the University of South Carolina, she lives in Nashville.

You can find her on Instagram and Threads **@margaret.renkl**, and on Facebook at **@margaretrenkl**. Visit her website at **margaretrenkl.com**.



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