



HOLIDAY TREATS

PEPPERMINT BARK BROWNIES

Makes 24 squares.

Brownies:

1 1/4 cup flour
1 tsp. kosher salt
1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa
2 cups (6 oz.) chocolate chips, divided
1 cup unsalted butter, cut into 1 inch pieces
1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
1/2 cup packed light brown sugar
5 large eggs, at room temperature
2 tsp. vanilla extract

Topping:

1 cup unsalted butter, softened
1 1/2 cups powdered sugar
1/2 tsp. peppermint extract
1 1/2 cups white chocolate chips, melted and cooled slightly
Pinch kosher salt
1/2 cup crushed candy canes or peppermint candies

1. For brownies, preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter the inside of 9x13-inch baking pan and line with parchment paper.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, and cocoa powder. Set a large heat-proof bowl over a saucepan of simmering water to create a double-boiler. Add the butter and 1 1/2 cups of the chocolate chips to the bowl. Heat, stirring occasionally until the chocolate and butter are completely melted and smooth. Remove bowl from heat, then whisk in the sugars and stir until combined.
3. Add the eggs one at a time, stirring well between each addition. Stir in vanilla. Sprinkle the flour mixture over the chocolate mixture and fold in the dry ingredients with a rubber spatula until just combined. Fold in remaining chocolate chips. Pour the batter into parchment paper-lined baking pan. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center of the brownies comes out with a few moist crumbs, about 30 minutes. Let cool completely.
4. In a large bowl using a hand mixer, beat butter, sugar, and peppermint extract until light and airy. Add white chocolate and salt and beat until smooth. Spread frosting over cooled brownies and sprinkle with crushed candy canes. Let frosting set before cutting into 24 small squares or 15 larger ones.

TRADITIONAL SUGAR COOKIES WITH BUTTERCREAM FROSTING

Makes 2 to 3 dozen depending on size.

Cookies:

1/2 cup unsalted butter
1 cup sugar
1 egg
2 T. whole milk
2 tsp. vanilla
2 cups flour plus more for rolling
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt

Frosting:

1/2 cup unsalted butter
3 cups sifted powdered sugar, divided use
1 1/2 tsp. vanilla
3 T. whole milk
Food coloring of your choice
Decorative candies

1. For cookies, beat butter and sugar with mixer until fluffy. Add egg and beat to combine.
2. Whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a medium bowl. Add half the flour to the mixer and beat to combine. Add the milk and vanilla and combine well. Add the remaining flour mixture and beat to combine. Chill dough at least 1 hour.
3. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Roll half the dough out on a floured work surface to 1/4-inch-thick (or thinner for crisper cookies). Using cookie cutters, cut out designs of your choice. Transfer cookies to parchment-lined baking sheets and bake 8 to 10 minutes, until set but not too brown (if getting too brown, lower heat to 375 degrees). Cool on cookie sheet 2 minutes before transfer to a rack to cool completely. Repeat with remaining dough, rolling out scrapes for a third batch.
4. For frosting, beat butter with 1 cup powdered sugar, vanilla and milk until smooth. Add the remaining powdered sugar and beat until fluffy, adding more milk by drops to make a spreadable consistency. Divide frosting into bowls and color each with a bit of food coloring. Frost cookies and sprinkle with decorative candies.

NANAIMO BARS (A Delicious Canadian Treat)

Makes 9 to 12.

Bottom Layer:

1 large egg
1/2 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
1/4 cup sugar
5 T. unsweetened cocoa powder
1 1/4 cups graham cracker crumbs
1/2 cup finely chopped almonds
1 cup sweetened flaky coconut

Custard Filling:

1/2 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 T. plus 2 tsp. heavy whipping cream or milk
2 T. vanilla custard powder (by Bird's) or instant vanilla pudding
2 cups powdered sugar

Chocolate Topping:

4 oz. semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
2 T. unsalted butter

1. Line an 8x8 inch square baking pan with aluminum foil that extends over at least 2 sides.
2. For the Bottom Layer, beat the egg in a medium bowl. Melt butter with sugar and cocoa in a medium saucepan over low heat. Whisk a small amount of the hot melted mixture into the egg to temper it. Return the egg mixture to the pan and whisking constantly, cook until the mixture reaches 160 degrees and begins to thicken. Remove from heat and stir in graham cracker crumbs, almonds and coconut. Press into prepared pan and refrigerate while making the next layer.
3. For the Custard Layer, beat the butter, cream or milk, custard powder and powdered sugar until well blended. Spread over the bottom layer and refrigerate at least 15 minutes or until set.
4. For Chocolate Layer, melt chocolate and butter in a small saucepan or in the microwave oven. Stir until smooth and pour over the chilled Custard Layer. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour or until set.
5. To serve, use foil to help lift the bars from the pan. Peel back the foil and cut into squares. Bars keep in the refrigerator for 1 month.

TRIPLE CHOCOLATE BISCOTTI DIPPED IN WHITE CHOCOLATE

Makes about 4 dozen.

9 oz. hazelnuts or blanched almonds
2 2/3 cups flour
1 cup cocoa powder
1 1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. salt
2 cups sugar
1 1/2 T. instant espresso
2/3 cup semisweet chocolate chips
5 large eggs
1 1/2 tsp. vanilla
12 oz. white chocolate

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Toast hazelnuts or almonds for about 10 minutes. If using Hazelnuts, rub off skins. Set aside to cool.
2. Put the flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, salt, sugar and espresso into a bowl of an electric mixer with the paddle attachment. Combine on medium low speed and then toss in the nuts and chocolate.
3. In a separate bowl lightly whisk together the eggs and vanilla. With the mixer running on low speed, slowly add the eggs to the flour and mix until dough comes together. Mix any remaining dough together by hand, if necessary.
4. Form logs by dumping dough onto a lightly floured work surface and kneading to bring dough together. Form into four equal parts. with floured hands, roll each part into a log about 10-inches long and 2 inches in diameter. Place logs 4 inch apart on 2 parchment-lined baking sheets.
5. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes or until sides are firm and the tops are cracked. Remove baking sheets from oven and reduce temperature to 300 degrees. Let logs cool for 10 minutes before slicing.
6. Cut logs on a slight diagonal into 3/4-inch-thick slices. Place on baking sheet, cut side down and dry them in oven for about 25 minutes or until biscotti offer resistance when pressed. Transfer to a rack to cool completely.
7. While cooling, chop the white chocolate and melt in microwave or in a double boiler. With knife spread white chocolate on one cut side of each cooled biscotti. Put biscotti, white-chocolate side down, on a parchment lined baking sheet. Allow the chocolate to harden. Peel the biscotti from parchment and store in an airtight container.

FORGOTTEN MERINGUE COOKIES

Makes 16 cookies.

2 large or extra-large egg whites, at room temperature
1/8 tsp. cream of tartar
Pinch salt
2/3 cup sugar
1 cup chocolate chips
1 cup lightly toasted walnuts

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Using a mixer, beat egg whites with cream of tartar and salt to soft peaks. Beat the sugar in slowly until whites are stiff. Fold in the chocolate chips and walnuts.
3. Drop batter by tablespoonfuls onto prepared baking sheet. Place pan in the oven and turn oven off. Leave cookies in the oven with the door closed overnight or 6 to 8 hours or until crisp. Store airtight at room temperature.

SPICY GLAZED NUTS

Makes 1 lb.

1/2 cup unsalted butter
1 cup brown sugar
1 tsp. orange zest
1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp. ground nutmeg
1 lb. walnuts or pecans halves (4 cups)

1. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper; set aside. In a 2-quart glass bowl or casserole, melt butter on HIGH power in the microwave oven for 45 seconds. Stir in brown sugar, orange zest, cinnamon and nutmeg. Cook, uncovered, on HIGH power 2 minutes. Mix well to combine all ingredients.
2. Stir in nuts, tossing to coat well. Cook, uncovered, on HIGH power 3 to 5 minutes, stirring after 2 minutes, or until nuts are toasted and well coated with candy mixture. Spread out on parchment paper to cool completely. Break up and serve warm or cold. Store in an airtight container.