

This week, we put our Drummerland Test Kitchen bakers to work making some Christmas cookies and bars. We hope you enjoy them as much as we did.

Pictured above, counter clockwise, from top, Ooey-Gooley Turtle Bars, Easy Peanut Butter Fudge, Christmas Apple Bread, Peanut Bars, Ginger Snaps, Old Fashion Pumpkin Cookies, Swedish Cookies, and center, Pretzel Hugs.

If you have a favorite recipe, send it in! Recipes, with photo (and a short story/history), if available, can be submitted to ads@thedrummer.com.

Ooey-Gooley Turtle Bars

Prep Time: 20 Min
Total Time: 4 Hr 25 Min
Yield: 24 bars

1 roll (16.5 oz) refrigerated sugar cookie dough
1 bag (12 oz) semisweet chocolate chips (2 c.)
3 c. chopped pecans
1/2 c. butter
1/2 c. packed light brown sugar
1 jar (12.25 oz.) caramel ice cream topping
1 c. graham cracker crumbs (16 squares)

Heat oven to 350°F (325°F for dark or nonstick pan). Press cookie dough evenly in bottom of ungreased 13x9-inch pan. Bake 10 minutes.

Sprinkle 1 cup of the chocolate chips and 1-1/2 cups of the pecans over partially baked crust. Set aside.

In 2-quart saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Stir in brown sugar, caramel topping and graham cracker crumbs. Heat to boiling, stirring constantly. Pour over crust in pan; spread evenly. Sprinkle with remaining 1 cup chocolate chips and 1-1/2 cups pecans.

Bake 25 to 32 minutes or until edges are deep golden brown and pecans are lightly toasted. Cool on cooling rack 30 minutes; loosen sides from pan, but do not cut. Cool completely, about 3 hours longer. (For firmer bars, let stand an additional 2 hours.) For bars, cut into 6 rows by 4 rows.

Easy Peanut Butter Fudge

1 tub vanilla or cream cheese frosting
1 (14-16 oz.) jar peanut butter

Place frosting in a microwave safe bowl and heat in microwave for 20 seconds. Quickly stir peanut butter into frosting and mix until well combined. Spread mixture into a 9 x 9 pan lined with parchment paper. Top with chocolate chips (optional) and press into pan. Chill in the refrigerator until firm. (This is a softer fudge.)

Christmas Apple Bread

Bread:

4 c. apples, peeled, cored & chopped (5-6 lg. apples)
4 lg. eggs, beaten
1 c. oil (olive or vegetable)
3 tsp. pure vanilla extract
2 tsp. baking soda
2 tsp. salt
2 tsp. cinnamon
3 c. all-purpose, unbleached flour
2 c. granulated white sugar

Topping:

3/4 c. all-purpose flour
1/4 c. granulated white sugar
2 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 c. butter (1 stick), room temp.

Pre-heat oven to 350°F. Lightly grease two standard loaf pans and set aside. Peel, core and slice the apples. Cut into good sized chunks, about 1/2 inch in size.

In a large bowl, beat the eggs with an electric mixer until fluffy. Add the oil and beat until combined. Add the vanilla, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon. Beat until thoroughly mixed.

Add the flour and sugar and mix on low (just to blend). Then, turn the mixer to high and beat until smooth. (The batter will be very thick, almost like cookie dough).

Fold in the chopped apples, mixing by hand with a spoon so the apples do not get broken up. Divide the mixture between the two pans.

To prepare the topping, combine the flour, sugar and cinnamon in a small bowl. Cut the butter into the mixture with a fork until all ingredients are moist and crumbly. Sprinkle equal amounts of topping on each loaf. Bake for about 1 hour. The loaf should feel fairly firm when touched in the middle. Remove from the oven and place on a cooling rack. Let cool for 5 minutes before removing from the pans.

Peanut Bars

12 oz. bag of chocolate chips (split)
1/4 c. plus 6 T. peanut butter
7 oz. container of marshmallow fluff
1-1/2 c. powdered sugar
1/2 (8 oz.) jar (or so) salted peanuts
11 oz. bag of caramel bits
1/4 c. heavy whipping cream
1 tsp. rum extract (split)

Place 1-1/8 cups chocolate chips in double boiler with 3 Tbls. peanut butter and 1/8 tsp. rum extract, melt thoroughly, pour into 9" x 13" cake pan, pre-sprayed lightly with olive oil.

Place in freezer to set up while making 2nd process.

Add fluff to double boiler, 1/4 cup peanut butter and another 1/4 tsp. rum extract, melt slightly, then add powdered sugar. Mix well. Melt until smooth consistency (pourable but still thick). Pour over 1st chocolate layer. Sprinkle 1/2 jar peanuts (8 oz) or so over this layer, press lightly into mixture.

Place back in freezer while doing next step.

Place caramel bits and 1/4 cup heavy whipping cream in double boiler. Melt completely. Pour over peanuts, spreading evenly, trying to avoid getting too much on side of pan (makes it too hard to get out of pan at the end). Return to freezer while doing final step.

Place balance of chocolate chips, 3 tablespoons. peanut butter and 1/8 teaspoon rum extract in double boiler and melt. Then pour over caramel, and spread evenly. Let set up in fridge for 1 hr. or so. Cut to size. Turn pan upside down and pat them out, then cut into approx. 1-1/2 in. bites.

Notes: Experimented with different extracts, Vanilla, Cherry, Orange - very good. Cherry and orange are my favorite. Experimented with orange rind in top layer of chocolate, along with orange extract, very good.

Ginger Snaps

1 c. sugar
3/4 c. margarine
1 egg
4 T. molasses
2 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt
2 c. flour
1 tsp. ginger
1 tsp. cloves
1 tsp. cinnamon

Cream sugar and margarine together. Add egg, molasses, baking soda and salt. Sift flour with spices and add to egg and sugar mixture slowly. Refrigerate overnight or until chilled. Roll into balls; then roll in sugar. Place on baking sheet and bake 8-10 minutes at 350°F.

Old-Fashioned Pumpkin Cookies

2-1/2 c. flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. nutmeg
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 c. butter (1 stick)
1 cup pumpkin (100% pure)
1 lg. egg
1 tsp. vanilla

Cream Cheese Frosting:

1/2 stick butter, room temp.
1 tsp. vanilla
4 c. powdered sugar
1 (8 oz.) pkg. cream cheese, room temp.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium-size bowl, combine the flour, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt.

In a separate large bowl, mix the butter and sugar until blended; add pumpkin, egg, vanilla and mix until batter is smooth.

Slowly add flour mixture to pumpkin batter, until well blended.

Drop rounded tablespoon-size cookie dough on baking sheet. Bake until edge of cookie is slightly golden brown, 15-18 minutes. Cool completely before frosting.

For frosting, mix all ingredients until smooth and spreadable consistency.

Swedish Cookies

This recipe is taken from Darlene Dixon's "The Cookie Book" Cookbook

1 lb. butter, room temp.
2 c. sugar
2 eggs
1 tsp. vanilla
1 to 1-1/2 tsp., pure almond extract
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. cream of tartar
1 tsp. salt
4 c. flour
Red and green colored sugar

In mixing bowl, cream butter and sugar until fluffy. Beat in eggs, vanilla, almond extract, baking soda, cream of tartar and salt. Stir in flour. Form into 1-1/2 inch balls, place on cookie sheets. Flatten just a little with glass dipped in sugar. Bake at 350 degrees for 8 minutes. Yield: 8 dozen

Pretzel Hugs

Round pretzels
Milk chocolate M&Ms®
Hershey's® Hugs

Preheat oven to 275 degrees. Line baking sheet with parchment paper.

Place a layer of pretzels on parchment paper. Place an unwrapped Hug in center of each pretzel.

Bake for 3 minutes. Immediately after removing from oven, place M&M on top of Hug, pushing it down, squishing the candy to help fill out the pretzel. To help them set, they can be placed in the refrigerator for a bit or placed in an unheated garage.

Quote of the Week:

"Never be afraid to try something new. Remember that a lone amateur built the Ark. A large group of professionals built the Titanic."

~ Dave Barry