

It is officially Christmas baking season! We are always on the hunt for the next “favorite” cookie for the cookie tray! Here are a few new options. If you have a favorite recipe you are willing to share with our readers... it's not too late to send in your recipes for a chance to win a Darlene Dixon cookbook prize package!

Submit your recipe and register to win at: clickit.entries@gmail.com.

(All submissions will be entered into the drawing and need to be received by Dec. 18, 2023. Please include: Name and phone number/email address. Winner will be announced and contacted. We do not ship the prizes, but are available for pick up Mon.-Thurs., 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.)

Apple Pie Thumbprint Cookies

Level: Easy

Total: 2 hr 10 min (includes chilling and cooling times)

Active: 30 min

Yield: 32 cookies

1 lb. baking apples such as Golden Delicious, Gala or Fuji (2 to 3 apples), peeled, cored and cut into 1/4-inch dice (about 2 1/2 C. diced)
1 T. lemon juice
1/2 tsp. apple pie spice
1/4 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1 C. sugar
10 T. unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 tsp. cornstarch
1-3/4 C. all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp. salt
1 lg. egg

Toss together the apples, lemon juice, apple pie spice, vanilla and 1/3 C. of the sugar in a medium bowl. Melt 2 T. of the butter in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the apple mixture and stir to coat with the butter. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally and adding about 1/4 C. water if the mixture becomes too dry or begins to brown, until the apples are tender and shiny, about 20 minutes. When the apples are tender, there should be some liquid left in the skillet; if not, add 1/4 C. water and stir. Mix the cornstarch with 1 tsp. water in a small bowl and pour it into the apple mixture. Stir well and bring the mixture to a boil to activate the starch. Cook until thick and bubbly, 30 seconds to 1 minute more. Transfer to a bowl and refrigerate for 15 minutes.

Whisk together the flour and salt in a bowl. In another bowl, beat the remaining 8 T. butter and 2/3 C. sugar with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until fluffy, about 5 minutes. Beat in the egg until just combined. Turn the mixer to low and gradually beat in the dry ingredients in 2 additions, beating until just incorporated.

Line 2 baking sheets with parchment. Scoop 1 T. portions of dough and roll between your hands to form 1-inch balls. Place about 2 inches apart on the prepared baking sheets. Gently press a thumbprint into the center of each ball about 1/2 inch deep, being careful not to crack the edges. Fill each indentation with 1 tsp. of the filling, then chill the cookies 15 minutes in the freezer.

Position oven racks in the top and bottom thirds of the oven and preheat to 350° F.

Bake, rotating the baking sheets from top to bottom and front to back about halfway through, until the cookies are set, about 30 minutes. Cool the cookies completely on the baking sheets. Store the cookies in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

Butterscotch Blondies

Level: Easy

Total: 1 hr 30 min (includes cooling time)

Active: 25 min

Yield: 9 servings

8 T. unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces
3/4 C. all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. salt
3/4 C. packed brown sugar
1 lg. egg
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1/2 C. pecans, toasted and chopped
1/2 C. white chocolate chips
1/2 C. dried cranberries
Butterscotch sauce, for drizzling
Flaky sea salt, for sprinkling, optional

Position an oven rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 350° F. Add 2 rectangular sheets of parchment to an 8-inch square baking pan in a crisscross fashion, leaving a 1-inch overhang on all sides once fitted in the pan. Set aside.

Cook the butter in a small saucepan over medium heat. Swirl as the butter melts so that it browns evenly. It will foam, then turn golden and finally turn a toasty brown, about 6 minutes. Once the aroma is nutty, remove it from the heat and pour into a large heatproof glass bowl. (You should have about 6 T. of browned butter.)

Whisk to combine the flour, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl.

Whisk the brown sugar into the browned butter until combined. Whisk in the egg and vanilla extract. Use a wooden spoon or rubber spatula to fold in the flour mixture until just combined. Then fold in the pecans, white chocolate chips and dried cranberries.

Spread the batter into the prepared pan in an even layer. Bake until set and firm when touched and the top is glossy and crackled, 20 to 24 minutes. Let cool to room temperature on a wire rack.

Lift the blondie out of the pan using the parchment handles and cut into 9 squares. Drizzle lightly with butterscotch sauce and sprinkle with flaky sea salt, if using. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 4 days.

Gingerbread Biscotti

level: Easy

Total: 1 hr 20 min

Active: 30 min

Yield: about 24 biscotti

1-3/4 C. all-purpose flour
2/3 C. granulated sugar
2-1/2 tsp. gingerbread spice
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. kosher salt
4 T. unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 T. molasses
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
2 lg. eggs
Two 4-oz bars white chocolate, chopped
1 T. coconut oil or vegetable shortening

White sanding sugar, for decorating

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment.

Pulse the flour, granulated sugar, gingerbread spice, baking powder and salt in a food processor until combined. Add the butter and pulse until the butter is thoroughly combined with the dry ingredients and the mixture looks sandy. Transfer to a large bowl.

Whisk together the molasses, vanilla, eggs and 1 tablespoon water in a small bowl; stir into the flour mixture until a crumbly dough forms. Press together and knead into a moist, uniform dough.

Divide the dough in half and place on the prepared baking sheet. Shape the dough into two 10-by-2-inch logs, keeping 3 inches between the logs. If the dough is sticky, splash a couple drops of water on your hands and continue shaping. Bake until the outside is set but the inside is still slightly soft, about 30 minutes.

Let cool for 5 minutes on the baking sheet. Transfer the logs to a cutting board and slice 1/2 inch thick on the bias with a serrated knife. Return the slices to the baking sheet, flat-side down, and bake, flipping the slices halfway through, until crisp, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer the biscotti to a wire rack to cool.

Once the biscotti are cool, combine the white chocolate and oil in a medium microwave-safe bowl. Microwave on high in 30-second increments, stirring occasionally, until melted and smooth, about 1-1/2 minutes total. Dip half of each biscotti at an angle in the white chocolate, letting the excess drip off. Return to the wire rack, then refrigerate until just set, about 5 minutes.

Pour the remaining white chocolate mixture into a small piping bag or resealable bag, then snip the tip or corner with kitchen shears to create a small hole. Drizzle the white chocolate at an angle across the dipped end of each biscotti, drizzling in the opposite direction to create a crisscross pattern. Return to the wire rack, then sprinkle with sanding sugar. Refrigerate until all the chocolate is completely set, about 10 minutes. The biscotti can be stored in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

M&M® Magic Bars

level: Easy

Total: 2 hr 5 min (includes cooling time)

Active: 30 min

Yield: 24 bar

8 T. unsalted butter, melted, plus more for buttering the dish
14 chocolate graham crackers
One 14-oz. can sweetened condensed milk
One 10-oz. bag mint chocolate chips
1 C. cocktail peanuts, coarsely chopped
2 C. mini marshmallows
1/2 C. red & green candy-coated chocolates, such as M&M's®
1/2 C. coarsely chopped candy canes
1/4 C. red and green sprinkles

Position an oven rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 350° F. Line a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with foil, leaving a 2-inch overhang on both sides. Butter the foil.

Pulse the graham crackers into fine crumbs in a food processor. Add the melted butter and pulse to combine (the mixture should hold together when squeezed). Transfer the mixture to the prepared baking dish and press it into the bottom in an even layer, using the bottom of a measuring cup to help. Pour the sweetened condensed milk over the crumbs. Sprinkle the chocolate chips, peanuts, marshmallows, M&M's®, candy canes and sprinkles over the condensed milk.

Bake until the sides are golden brown and begin to pull away from the baking dish, 30 to 35 minutes. Let cool completely, about 1 hour. Using the foil liner as handles, lift the bars out of the baking dish; remove the foil. Cut into 24 bars.

Red Velvet Ooey Goopy Bars

Level: Easy
Total: 5 hr 30 min (includes chilling and cooling times)
Active: 15 min
Yield: 24 servings

Cake:

Nonstick baking spray
One 15.25-oz. box red velvet cake mix
4 lg. eggs, at room temp.
2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
12 T. unsalted butter, melted and cooled, divided
8 oz. cream cheese, at room temperature
3 C. confectioners' sugar

Royal Icing:

4 C. confectioners' sugar
3 T. meringue powder
Sprinkles, for decorating, optional

For the cake: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a 9-by-13-inch cake pan with aluminum foil and spray with nonstick baking spray.

Add the cake mix, 1 tsp. of the vanilla extract and 2 of the eggs to the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Beat on medium speed until combined, about 1 minute. Add 8 T. of the butter and mix until just combined. Spread the batter evenly in the prepared pan with an offset spatula.

Beat the cream cheese in a separate bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment on medium speed until light and smooth, scraping down the sides occasionally, about 2 minutes. With the mixer running on medium-low speed, add the remaining 2 eggs and 1 tsp. vanilla extract. Once combined, add the remaining 4 T. butter and beat until smooth. With the mixer running on low speed, add the confectioners' sugar, one spoon at a time, until combined, scraping down the sides occasionally. Evenly pour the mixture over the cake layer and smooth the top with an offset spatula.

Bake until the edges are puffed and golden brown and the center is just set, 30 to 35 minutes. Let cool on a wire rack for 30 minutes, and then chill in the refrigerator at least 4 hours

For the royal icing: Add the confectioners' sugar, meringue powder and 6 T. water to the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Whisk until stiff peaks form.

Transfer the chilled cake to a baking sheet and remove the foil. Spread an even layer of royal icing on the cake with an offset spatula and decorate with sprinkles if desired. Cut into 24 bars.

Quote of the Week:

"We have not forgotten, nor will we. We live in a world made more free, more just, and more peaceful by those who will answer roll call no more, those who will report for muster never again. We do remember Pearl Harbor."

~ Ronald Reagan