

Toffee Butter Crunch

©2014 by David A. Katz

Ingredients

1 cup (2 sticks, 1/2 pound) butter (salted or unsalted Note: if unsalted butter is used, add ½ teaspoon of salt to the mixture.)
1 ½ cups (approximately 300 g) granulated sugar
3 Tablespoons (45 mL) water
1 Tablespoon (15 mL) light corn syrup
Optional: 1 teaspoon (5 mL) vanilla extract
2 cups (approximately 225 g) pecans or blanched whole or slivered almonds, toasted (Note: whole almonds with the skin on can be used if desired.)
1 pound (454 g) semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped (Note: Baking or candy chocolate is preferred. Chocolate chips can be used without chopping them, however, they take longer to harden than the baking chocolate.)

Instructions

Toast the nuts.

Preheat an oven to 350°F (177°C)

Place the pecans or almonds on a baking sheet. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes until golden brown and fragrant.

Allow the nuts to cool to room temperature. Chop by hand or pulse in a food processor fitted with a metal blade.

Prepare a baking sheet

Use an 8 x 10 inch (20 x 25 cm) or a 9 x 13 inch (23 x 33 cm) baking sheet with sides.

Lightly grease the baking sheet. You can use a baking spray or butter.

Spread about ½ of the nuts evenly on the baking sheet. Sprinkle with ½ of the chocolate.

Prepare the buttercrunch

Use a 2 ½ to 3 quart (2 ½ to 3 liter) saucepan.

Add the butter, sugar, water and corn syrup. Melt the mixture over low heat.

Increase the heat to medium and bring the mixture to a boil.

Place a candy thermometer in the pan. Boil gently, over medium heat, until the mixture reaches 300°F (150°C). This is just below the hard-crack stage. The mixture will bubble and slowly change color to amber as it approaches 300°F.

Remove the pan from the heat. If you are using the vanilla, add it and stir.

Pour the mixture evenly over the nuts and chocolate in the baking pan.

Allow the mixture to set for about 2 minutes. Add the remaining chocolate to the top of the mixture. The chocolate will melt from the heat of the mixture. Use a spatula to gently spread the chocolate evenly over the mixture, then add the remaining nuts.

Allow the chocolate to set. Remove the candy from the baking sheet. Allow it to cool.

Break the candy into chunks.

Explanation

Addition of the water allows the sugar to dissolve and the butter to melt without scorching. The water will evaporate during the heating process.

The sugar changes color due to the Maillard reaction (named after L. C. Maillard) in which amino acids react with reducing sugars producing the brown color and associated flavors to foods heated to a temperature between 284° to 329°F (140° to 165°C).

When the temperature reaches 285°F, the mixture will be light brown in color. As the temperature reaches 300°F, it becomes darker. Above 300°F, the final product will be dark brown and will burn.