

Salt and Serenity

Pecan Toffee Bars

Adapted very slightly from Cook's Illustrated recipe for *Ultranutty Pecan Bars* in the November 2015 issue.

4 cups pecan halves

Crust:

4 ounces (1 stick) unsalted butter

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour

6 Tablespoons sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt

Topping:

7 tablespoons (3 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces) unsalted butter

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup packed light brown sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup golden corn syrup

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon fleur de sel

4 ounces milk chocolate, finely chopped

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and preheat oven to 350°F. Spread pecans in a single layer on a baking sheet and toast in preheated oven until fragrant and slightly darkened, about 8-10 minutes. Set aside to cool.
2. Spray 10x10 inch square pan or 9x13 inch rectangular pan with Pam. Cut out a square or rectangle of parchment paper that is about 3 inches larger all around the edges. Centre the tin on the parchment, and then make four cuts from the paper's edge right up to the corners of the tin. Fit the baking parchment inside the pan, folding and overlapping it at the corners.
3. Make crust: Melt butter in a medium saucepan. Remove pan from heat and, using a spatula, stir in sugar, vanilla and salt. Set spatula aside and use your hands mix the dough until no dry flour remains and small portion of dough holds together when squeezed in palm of your hand. Evenly scatter tablespoon-size pieces of dough over surface of pan. Using your fingertips and palm of your hand, press and smooth dough into even thickness in bottom of pan. The bottom of a metal measuring cup is a great tool to help do this. Bake crust for 5 minutes. Remove from oven and set aside.

4. Make topping: Whisk sugar, corn syrup, vanilla, and salt together in medium bowl. Melt butter in a medium sized saucepan. Pour melted butter over sugar mixture and whisk until smooth. Fold pecans into sugar mixture until nuts are evenly coated. Pour topping over the crust. Use a spatula to help spread the topping into the corners. You will have some bare spots, but don't worry, once the pan goes back in the oven, the topping will melt during baking and distribute itself evenly over the crust.
5. Bake for 25 minutes until the topping is dark and bubbling. Remove from oven, sprinkle with fleur de sel and set on a wire rack to cool.
6. Place milk chocolate in a 1 cup Pyrex measuring cup. Microwave on medium power for 1 minute. Stir until all the chocolate is melted. Transfer chocolate to a small disposable piping bag and pipe milk chocolate decoratively over the cooled bars. (Or, alternatively, use a fork to drizzle melted chocolate over top of bars.) Chill bars in fridge for several hours.
7. Lift ends of parchment paper and transfer toffee bars to a cutting board. Use a long sharp knife to cut into 24 squares (for 9x13 pan) or 25 bars (for 10x10 pan).
8. Bars will keep well in an airtight container for a week, or the freezer for up to a month.