

# Salt and Serenity

## Crisp Toffee Pecan Bars

The original recipe for these bars belongs to Maida Heatter. Charlotte Druckman adapted it in her book on cast-iron baking. This is my adaptation.

The bars are baked in a 12-inch cast iron pan. The cast iron pan allows the bottom of the dough to caramelize to a gorgeous burnished finish. You can also bake the dough in a 9x13 inch baking pan, but you will not get the same degree of caramelization.

Makes 16 wedges/bars

- 2 sticks (225 grams) unsalted butter, cold but not frozen, cut into 1 inch cubes
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup (210 grams) lightly packed dark brown sugar
- 2 cups (240 grams) unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 cup (100 grams) toasted pecans, chopped
- 1 cup (170 grams) bittersweet chocolate chips or chunks
- ¾ cup (100 grams) Skor or Heath bits
- 1 Tablespoon unsalted butter for brushing in pan
- 1 teaspoon Maldon sea salt or Fleur de sel

1. Heat oven to 350 °F. Place a rack in the middle and place a 12-inch cast-iron skillet on it.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter on low speed for about a minute, until softened. Scrape down the bowl and the paddle.
3. With the mixer running at low speed, add salt and vanilla. Add the brown sugar, then turn the speed up to medium and beat until mixture is the color of peanut butter and fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes. Scrape down the bowl again.
4. With the mixer running at low speed, shake in flour, beating just until dough holds together. Add pecans, chocolate and toffee bits and mix briefly, just until combined.

5. Remove the hot skillet from the oven and place 1 tablespoon of butter in it. As butter melts, brush it onto the bottom and sides of the pan until evenly coated.
6. Dump dough into skillet and, using the bottom of a measuring cup, press it out to evenly fill the skillet. Be careful to avoid touching the hot pan. Press dough down firmly to make a compact, even layer. Sprinkle sea salt over top of dough.
7. Transfer to oven and bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until the top is walnut brown. You may be tempted to take it out when the edges have begun to darken, but let it continue to cook so the entire surface can take on that color. There may be bubbles visible on top of the dough; that's a good sign.
8. Remove from the oven and let cool in the pan for about 15 minutes. With a dinner knife, score the circle into 16 wedges.
9. Let the bars cool completely before removing from pan. Use a small spatula or butter knife to transfer them to paper towels to blot the buttery bottoms. Store in airtight container; they keep well for up to 1 week, or can be frozen for up to 2 months.