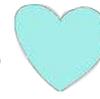




Homemade Peanut Butter Cups



I discovered this recipe when my kids were all young. These taste so much better than the store-bought variety. They take a little patience to make but turn out oh-so-delicious! For presentation, purchase a tin with a lid at a second-hand store or dollar store. I even found a few vintage Reese's peanut butter cup ones at my local Goodwill. Line the tin with tissue paper and place the finished cups inside. Include a copy of one of the "Happy Valentine's Day!" or scripture tags provided.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup natural creamy peanut butter, divided
- 1/2 cup confectioners' sugar (may need a little more to get the right consistency)
- 2 tablespoons real butter, room temperature (no substitutes)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 1/4 cups semisweet chocolate chips
- 4 regular size Hershey's milk chocolate candy bars, coarsely chopped
- 3 dozen foil or paper mini-muffin tin liners (foil work best)
- Mini-muffin tins

*NOTE: You may also make jumbo-sized ones using regular muffin tins and liners.

Instructions:

- In a medium sized bowl, combine 1/2 cup peanut butter and butter, blending until smooth. Mix in salt and confectioners' sugar.
- Using a double-boiler or a bowl in the microwave, gently melt chocolate chips, candy bars, and remaining peanut butter, stirring until smooth.
- Using an eating teaspoon, drop enough chocolate mixture into paper-lined mini muffin tins to coat the bottom and spread up the sides. Place in the refrigerator to harden up a bit, about five minutes.
- Next, drop a little less than a teaspoon of the peanut butter mixture into each cup, keeping it in the center. Work quickly so the remaining chocolate does not harden. Using the eating teaspoon, top with enough of chocolate mixture to cover the top thoroughly and also touch the sides where the first chocolate mixture is.
- Refrigerate until set. Store in an airtight container at room temperature. Makes three dozen mini ones or about 12 regular muffin size.



Cinnamon-Spiced Nuts



These are reminiscent of the kind you smell roasting at the county fair. If you want to make a sweet and spicy variety, add a few dashes of hot sauce to the egg mixture and 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper to the spices. Give finished nuts in small cellophane bags found in the floral section of a craft store, tied shut with curling ribbon. Or present them in a clear canning jar. If using a jar, cut a piece of fabric in a circle that is four inches wider in diameter than the top of the jar. Secure fabric to the top of the jar with a rubber band and then tie some jute twine or ribbon around the jar, covering the rubber band. Include a copy of the “I am totally nuts about you!” tag.

Ingredients:

- 2 egg whites (lightly beaten)
- 2 tablespoons cold water
- 6 cups walnut or pecan halves
- 1 cup white sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 1/4 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- Parchment paper

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a large baking sheet with sides with parchment paper. In a large bowl, beat the egg whites and water with a whisk until blended. Stir in nuts until well coated.

In a small bowl mix together sugar, salt, and spices. Sprinkle over the nuts and stir again, coating completely.

Spread nuts out evenly on prepared baking sheet. Bake for 20-25 minutes, stirring about every 10 minutes, until nuts are no longer dry and look toasted but not burned. If they don't look done after 25 minutes, bake them for two more minutes at a time until done, watching closely. Remove from oven. Cool completely and store at room temperature in a tightly covered container. Makes about 6 cups.



Honey-Lemon Poppy Seed Bread



As pretty as it is tasty! Be sure to tie a wide ribbon around the foil-wrapped loaf and include a copy of the Scripture tag of Proverbs 16:24 that reads: “Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”

Ingredients:

2 sticks unsalted butter, softened
2 1/2 cups granulated sugar, divided
2 tablespoons honey
4 large eggs
1/4 cup grated lemon zest
3/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice, divided
3/4 cup buttermilk
1 teaspoon pure almond extract
3 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons poppy seeds

Glaze ingredients:

2 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
3 1/2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
Dash of almond extract

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour two 8-inch loaf pans. With an electric mixer, cream the butter, 2 cups sugar, and honey in a large bowl until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time. Add lemon zest. Mix in 1/4 cup lemon juice, the buttermilk, and almond extract.

Sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in a separate bowl. Combine the flour and buttermilk mixtures together mixing until smooth. Stir in poppy seeds. Divide the batter evenly between the pans and bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour or until a cake tester comes out clean. If the top begins to brown too much, cover with a piece of foil gently set on top.

Combine 1/2 cup granulated sugar with 1/2 cup lemon juice in a small saucepan and cook over low heat until the sugar dissolves. Let loaves cool for 10 minutes. Remove from the pans and set them on wax paper or foil. Drizzle the lemon syrup over them. Let loaves cool completely.

For the glaze, combine the confectioners' sugar, lemon juice and almond extract in a bowl, mixing with a wire whisk until smooth. Pour over the tops of the cakes and allow the glaze to drizzle down the sides.

For giving: Once the cake and icing have completely cooled and set, wrap in foil, being careful not to wrap the top and sides too tightly due to the icing. You may also give in bakery boxes designed for 9-inch loaf pans. You can find these at craft and gourmet food stores. You may also carefully slice the loaf and arrange some slices on a plate and cover with plastic wrap before giving.



Dark Chocolate-Cherry Fudge



This easy recipe combines the traditional flavors of sweet chocolate and tart cherry for a creamy, dreamy treat. Give squares of these in vintage loaf or pie pans, purchased from a second-hand store. Look for glass ones in fun, retro colors or those that are speckled enamelware. Sprinkle some foil-wrapped chocolate hearts around the fudge pieces. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and place a copy of one of the “Happy Valentine’s Day” or Scripture tags provided on top.

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 2/3 cup evaporated milk
- 2 tablespoons butter (no substitutes)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups mini marshmallows
- 1 2/3 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 3/4 cup dried, tart cherries, coarsely chopped
- 1 teaspoon almond extract

Directions:

Line an 8-inch-square baking pan with foil. In a medium sized saucepan, stir sugar, evaporated milk, butter, and salt and bring to a full rolling boil over medium heat, stirring constantly. Once it begins to boil, keep stirring continually for 5 minutes.

Remove from heat and stir in marshmallows, chocolate chips, dried cherries, and almond extract. Stir vigorously for 1 minute or until marshmallows are melted all the way.

Pour into foil-lined pan. Refrigerate for 1 hour or until firm. Lift from pan and peel off the foil. Cut into squares of desired size. (I usually cut into 36 squares, but you can make them bigger or smaller.)



Easy Sea Salt Chocolate Pretzel Turtles



These are such a snap to make. Kids will enjoy helping by unwrapping the Rolos and placing them on the pretzels while you put up your feet and sip something hot to drink! For giving, place cooled turtles in a clear canning jar with lid. Fold a new dish cloth in half and then fold in half again. Place over the top of the jar and secure with a rubber band. Tie some raffia or jute twine around the jar, covering the rubber band. Include a copy of one of the “Happy Valentines Day!” or Scripture tags provided.

Ingredients:

- 21 waffle shaped mini-pretzels (the square -shaped ones)
- 21 chocolate covered caramel candies (Rolos. A roll has seven candies so you’ll need three rolls)
- 21 pecan halves
- Coarse sea salt
- Parchment paper

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Arrange the waffle pretzels in a single layer on a parchment lined cookie sheet. Place one Rolo on each pretzel.

Bake for three minutes, just until the Rolos melt slightly. Remove pan from oven. Immediately sprinkle with a tiny bit of sea salt and then press a pecan half onto each pretzel. Cool completely before storing in an airtight container. Makes 21 turtles.