

## Salty Peanut Squares

Holiday Cookies | December 2005/January 2006



- 3 CUPS PLUS 2 TBSP. ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR
- 1 CUP PACKED BROWN SUGAR
- 1 TSP. KOSHER SALT
- 22 TBSP. (2 STICKS PLUS 6 TBSP.) UNSALTED BUTTER, CHILLED AND CUT INTO PIECES
- 16 TBSP. (2 STICKS) UNSALTED BUTTER
- 1/4 CUP GRANULATED SUGAR
- 1 1/2 CUPS PLUS 2 TBSP. PACKED BROWN SUGAR
- 1/2 CUP HONEY
- 1/4 CUP PLUS 1 TBSP. WHIPPING CREAM
- 1/4 TSP. KOSHER SALT
- 1 TSP. VANILLA
- 3 1/2 CUPS (18 1/2 OZ.) ROASTED SALTED PEANUTS

Form a foil liner for a 15×10×1-inch half sheet pan\* or jelly roll pan by inverting the pan and molding a sheet of aluminum foil over the bottom of the pan. The foil should extend over the edges of the pan. Reinvert the pan, butter it, and fit the foil liner into the pan. Butter the foil. Set aside. This will make it much easier to remove the baked squares from the pan.

For the crust, place the flour, 1 cup brown sugar, and 1 teaspoon salt in a food processor with a steel blade and pulse to blend. Add the 22 tablespoons butter and process until the dough just starts to come together—do not let the dough form a ball. Evenly press the dough into the bottom and up the sides of the prepared pan. Chill the dough until firm (about 30 minutes). The crust can be prepared to this point up to 2 days ahead of time.

In a 350° oven, bake the chilled crust until lightly browned (about 25 to 30 minutes), rotating the pan half way through baking. Check the crust periodically, and if it's puffing up at all, press it down gently with a fork. Set baked crust aside while preparing the filling.

For the filling, combine the 16 tablespoons butter, granulated sugar, 1 1/2 cups plus 2 tablespoons brown sugar, and honey in a large saucepan and cook, whisking, over medium heat until the butter is melted and the mixture is smooth. Bring to a boil and boil for 3 minutes, whisking several times. Remove from heat and add the cream, 1/4 teaspoon salt, vanilla, and peanuts. Stir to blend.

Pour the filling over the baked crust, spreading evenly with an offset spatula. Make sure the nuts are well distributed.

Bake 25 to 30 minutes more until filling is evenly bubbling and golden brown. The filling will appear fairly set when pan is shaken. Remove from oven; allow to cool completely.

Grasp the foil liner; pull up to loosen foil from pan. Cover bars with a baking sheet and invert. Peel foil liner off crust. Cover the bars with a second baking sheet and reinvert onto a cutting surface. With a long, heavy knife, cut into 1 1/4-inch squares. These can be made and chilled up to 3 days. Or, freeze for up to 3 months. Bring bars to room temperature before serving. Makes 88 squares.

\*TIP: Be sure pan has 1-inch sides. If the sides are slightly shorter than 1 inch, place a foil-lined baking pan on rack below pan when baking.

NOTE: Baking to proper doneness is critical with these cookies. If underbaked, the filling will not set up properly; if overbaked, they will be hard. Although filling will start to bubble after about 15 minutes, the bubbles will become more numerous and appear larger as end of baking time nears. Color is the best indicator—filling should appear nicely caramelized but should not even approach dark brown.

Recipe from *Sweet Stuff: Karen Barker's American Desserts* by Karen Barker. Copyright ©2004 by Karen Barker. Used by permission of the University of North Carolina Press.