

The DISH



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Have you started your holiday baking yet? I usually wait until right before Christmas so it's not sitting around for us to constantly munch on. I like to be able to share it!

Well, with the snowstorm we had this last weekend, (note I'm already counting the days until summer) my oldest daughter, Brooke, came out and we did some baking. So, I thought I'd share a few of the things we made — and I still have a couple I'd like to make yet, including my Grandma Vi's Date on a Ritz, which is a family tradition/favorite!

Happy baking everyone!

Peanut Butter Pretzel Crockpot Candy

- ¼ cup butter, cubed
- 2 cups salted roasted peanuts
- 24 oz. white almond bark (or white chocolate chips), reserve 6 oz.
- 11.5 oz. milk chocolate chips
- 10.5 oz. semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 2 cups creamy peanut butter
- 8 oz. pretzel twists, lightly crushed
- Sprinkles, opt.

Prepare baking sheets with silicone mats or parchment paper.

Add butter to the bottom of the Crock-Pot. Add peanuts, white almond bark, milk chocolate chips, semi-sweet chocolate chips and peanut butter. Turn Crock-Pot on high. Stir after 20 minutes. Turn Crock-Pot down to low and allow to cook for an additional 30 minutes.

Stir until all chocolate is melted and ingredients are well combined. If chocolate still isn't fully melted, allow to cook for an additional 10 minutes, check in 5 minutes intervals and stir each time. Be careful to not let the chocolate overcook and burn.

Once all chocolate is melted, add lightly crushed pretzels, stir to combine. Turn off Crock-Pot.

Using a 2 Tbsp. cookie scoop, scoop clusters onto cookie sheets or parchment paper. Allow to set until hardened, about 60 to 90 minutes.

In a microwave-safe bowl, add remaining white chocolate chips (or white almond bark) and melt in 30 second

intervals, stirring well after each pass. This should take 60-90 seconds, depending on the strength of the microwave.

Pour white chocolate into a sandwich-size Ziploc bag, gently press the air out of the bag while sealing. Cut a small corner off the bag and drizzle the white chocolate over the clusters. Top with festive sprinkles, if desired, and allow to cool for another 30-60 minutes before serving or packaging.

Sugar Cookie Christmas Fudge

- 14 oz. can sweetened condensed milk
- 2½ cups white chocolate chips
- 1¼ cup sugar cookie mix
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- Christmas sprinkles (or sprinkles of your choice)

Prepare a 9-by-9-inch baking dish with parchment paper and a thin layer of non-stick spray. Set aside.

Add sweetened condensed milk to a large pot and heat over medium heat, stirring often. Once hot, stir in the white chocolate chips, sugar cookie mix and butter. Continue stirring until melted and smooth. Stir in a generous amount of Christmas sprinkles.

Pour fudge mixture into the prepared dish and top with more sprinkles. Place in refrigerator and allow to set overnight or until firm (at least 2 hours). Slice into bite-size pieces and serve.

For longer storage keep in the refrigerator for up to 3 weeks.

Christmas Cracker Toffee

- Ritz crackers
- Peanut butter
- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- Mini chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Put some peanut butter on top of a Ritz cracker and place another Ritz cracker on top like a sandwich. Put them into a muffin tin.

In saucepan combine butter and brown sugar. Once it boils let it cook for 3-5 minutes to caramelize.

Ladle the caramel on top of the crackers. Bake for no more than 5 minutes. Remove from the oven and immediately sprinkle the top with chocolate chips. When the chips start to melt, smooth it out over the top.

You can garnish with some sea salt, if you like. Put into the refrigerator until the chocolate hardens.

Homemade Caramels

- 2 cups white granulated sugar
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 cup corn syrup
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1 pint (2 cups) heavy whipping cream
- 1 cup butter
- 1¼ tsp. vanilla extract

In a medium size pot, combine everything except the vanilla. Monitor the heat of the mixture with a candy thermometer while stirring occasionally.

When the thermometer reaches 245 degrees, remove pot from heat. Stir in vanilla.

Transfer mixture to a 9-by-13-inch pan lined with parchment paper. Let the caramel cool completely. (Cover it with plastic wrap after a couple hours and leave it on the counter overnight to cool.) When cooled, cut the caramel into small squares and wrap them in wax paper for storage. Enjoy!

Notes: Line your pan with foil, then spray the foil. Taking the caramel block out of the pan is a breeze after it's cooled! Don't feel like you have to stir the mixture continuously, it's OK to let it boil for a few minutes in between periods of stirring. When cutting the caramels, err on the side of smaller pieces, especially if you have small children.