

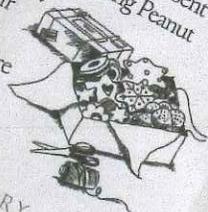
COOKIES WITH A STORY

A cookie is never just a cookie, and these tales prove why. Whether cheering up deployed soldiers or inspiring a novel, the right recipe connects us to memories that taste so sweet.

CHAPTER ONE

The cookie that cheered the troops

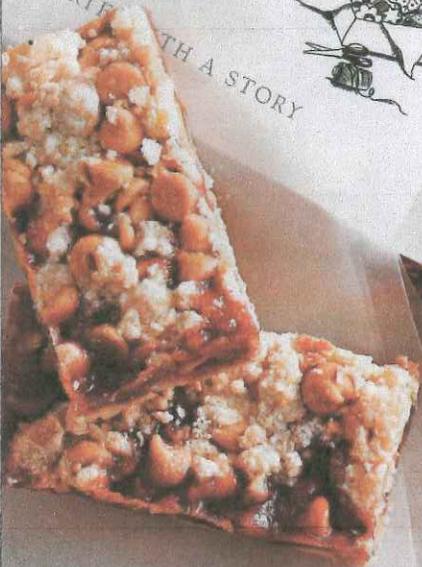
Wisconsin's Karen Grochowski joined the long tradition of moms mailing treats to soldiers in far-off places when her son deployed. "Before Brian had his boots on the ground other soldiers," Karen says. When a unit requested cookies, she and her volunteers started baking using the local Franklin Public Library as drop-off point. Last year, they sent 30,000 cookies, including Peanut Butter Chip and Jelly Bars chosen for their popular flavor. "This has made the holidays much more special for me," Karen says.



CHAPTER TWO

The cookie that thanked the volunteers

Minneapolis blogger Alyssa Ruesch decided that a cookie exchange could serve more than just the people who did the baking. She and her friends gave dozens and dozens of their fresh-baked cookies to the volunteers who deliver for the Northeast Meals on Wheels program. "I think sharing some homemade goods is a nice way to recognize the volunteers' efforts, even if it's a small way of doing so," she says. Eight bakers used one of the oven-baked favorites from the Logan Park Community Kitchen. "Despite a minor smoke plume coming from one of the ovens, we managed to yield quite an assortment!" says Alyssa, who will bake a sentimental favorite this year: her grandma's slice-and-bake Date Pinwheel Cookies.



Peanut Butter Chip and Jelly Bars

Date Pinwheel Cookies.
For recipes, see page 59.

seconds. (Or melt in small stainless-steel bowl over a small saucepan of simmering water.) Stir in 1/4 cup espresso coffee, vanilla, cinnamon and allspice. Cool to room temperature.

3. In a large bowl, combine the eggs, sugar, cocoa and the 1/4 teaspoon salt; whisk until creamy. Add cocoa nibs (if you like), flour and chocolate mixture; whisk to combine. (Do not beat.) Pour into prepared pan. If you like, sprinkle with coarse salt.

4. Bake in 375° oven 35 minutes (center may be soft set). Cool in pan on wire rack 15 minutes. Remove sides of pan; cool. Cut into wedges. If you like, serve with whipped cream and spice. **Makes 8 to 10 servings.**

Note: Cocoa nibs are pieces of cocoa bean left after beans are roasted and crushed. Adapted from *The Splendid Table's How to Eat Weekends*.

Nutrition facts per serving: 472 cal, 29 g fat, 140 mg chol, 117 mg sodium, 51 g carbo, 5 g fiber, 7 g pro.

Date Pinwheel Cookies

Alyssa Ruesch of Minneapolis writes the VVG blog. She says it's not Christmas without these slice-and-bake cookies. It's her grandma's recipe. Prep: 45 minutes Chill: 1 to 2 hours Freeze: 2 to 24 hours Bake: 8 minutes per batch

- 1 cup finely snipped pitted whole dates
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/3 cup butter, softened
- 1/3 cup shortening
- 2 cups packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 2 eggs
- 3 tablespoons whipping cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

1. For filling: In a small saucepan, combine dates, sugar and the water. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Cook and stir 2 minutes or until thickened; cool.

2. In a large mixing bowl, beat butter and shortening with electric mixer 30 seconds. Add brown sugar, baking soda, salt and cream of tartar. Beat mixture until combined, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Beat in eggs, cream and vanilla until combined. Beat in as much of the flour as you can with mixer. Stir in any remaining flour. Divide dough in half. Cover; chill dough for 1 to 2 hours or until it's easy to handle.

3. Roll half the dough between pieces of waxed paper into a 13x8-inch rectangle. Spread with half of the filling. Sprinkle with half of the walnuts. Starting from a long side, roll up dough using bottom layer of waxed paper to help lift and guide the roll. Pinch dough edges to seal; wrap in plastic wrap. Repeat with remaining dough, filling and walnuts. Freeze 2 to 24 hours.

4. Grease cookie sheets or line with parchment paper; set aside. Use a serrated knife to cut rolls into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Place slices 1 inch apart on cookie sheets. Bake in 375° oven 8 to 10 minutes or until bottoms are light brown. Cool on cookie sheet 1 minute. Transfer to a wire rack; cool. **Makes 60.**

Nutrition facts per cookie: 106 cal, 4 g fat, 11 mg chol, 72 mg sodium, 17 g carbo, 1 g fiber, 1 g pro.

Mrs. Truman's Coconut Balls

Here's our version of Bess Truman's coconut cookie recipe from the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. We added the fruit. Prep: 10 minutes Bake: 12 minutes per batch

- 1 7-ounce package flaked coconut (2 2/3 cups)
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1/2 cup sweetened condensed milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries or snipped dried cherries (optional)

1. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper; set aside. In a medium mixing bowl, combine coconut and cornstarch. Stir in milk and vanilla. Stir in dried fruit, if you like.

2. Drop by small rounded teaspoonfuls about 1-inch apart on prepared cookie sheets. Bake in a 325° oven 12 to 15 minutes or until light brown on bottoms. Cool on cookie sheets 1 minute. Transfer cookies to a wire rack; cool. **Makes about 24.**

Nutrition facts per cookie: 70 cal, 3 g fat, 2 mg chol, 30 mg sodium, 9 g carbo, 1 g fiber, 1 g pro.

Pecan Butter Balls

This tender cookie—a family recipe from author Ann Pearlman of Ann Arbor, Michigan—pops with toasty pecan flavor. You'll find the recipe in her novel *The Christmas Cookie Club*. Prep: 30 minutes Bake: 15 minutes

- 2 cups finely chopped pecans
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup butter, melted

- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar

1. In a large bowl, stir together pecans, flour, granulated sugar and salt. Add butter and vanilla; mix well. Shape dough into a ball. With floured hands, shape into about 1-inch balls. Place balls 2 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheets.

2. Bake in a 325° oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until bottoms are light brown. Cool slightly on a wire rack. Place powdered sugar in a large plastic bag. Add slightly warm cookies in batches to bag. Gently shake to coat. Return to cooling rack. Repeat coating with powdered sugar when completely cool, too. **Makes about 60 cookies.**

Nutrition facts per cookie: 86 cal, 6 g fat, 8 mg chol, 32 mg sodium, 8 g carbo, 0 g fiber, 1 g pro.

* Peanut Butter Chip and Jelly Bars

Connie Seigel bakes these bars to take to a Wisconsin library where Karen Grochowski organizes the packing and shipping of these and other cookies. They're sent to soldiers overseas who yearn for a taste of home. Prep: 20 minutes Bake: 25 minutes

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 cup butter or margarine
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 3/4 cup grape jelly
- 1 10-ounce package peanut butter-flavored pieces (1 2/3 cups)

1. Grease a 9x9x2-inch baking pan; set aside.

2. In a large bowl, mix flour, sugar and baking powder. Using a pastry blender, cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add egg; mix well. Remove and reserve half of the crumb mixture (about 1 1/2 cups). Press remaining crumb mixture into the bottom of the prepared pan.

3. Spread jelly over crust. Sprinkle with 1 cup peanut butter pieces. Mix reserved crumb mixture and remaining peanut butter pieces. Sprinkle over top, pressing lightly.

4. Bake in a 350° oven for 25 to 30 minutes or until lightly browned. Cool in pan on a wire rack. Cut into bars. **Makes 18 bars.**

Nutrition facts per bar: 231 cal, 10 g fat, 27 mg chol, 60 mg sodium, 34 g carbo, 0 g fiber, 2 g pro. ■

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