



Homenage for the H

By Kate Rockwood

*Photographs by
Johnny Miller*

made holidays

Stunning, scrumptious, and **A CINCH TO WHIP UP—** these are the **ESSENTIAL QUALITIES** of any brilliant edible gift. Here, star chefs and cookbook authors **SHARE THE TREATS** they've given for years that can **BRIGHTEN YOUR OWN CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS.**

GLAZED HOLIDAY COOKIES

"I've always been better at fixing a meal in a skillet than executing meticulous cookie-decorating techniques," says Ree Drummond, host of the Food Network show *The Pioneer Woman*. Luckily, Drummond learned a foolproof, nonfussy method from her mom, Gee, who would make these painted sugar cookies for almost any holiday year-round. Rather than frost after baking, Drummond brushes on a colored egg wash before the cookies go in the oven, which creates a stained-glass effect. "The trick is to use really soft bristles, like those on a watercolor paintbrush, so you don't scratch the dough," she says. The result is vibrant, even color that transforms a simple dough into a sophisticated gift.

For recipe, see page 174.





CHOCOLATE DECADENT BITES

These two-bite treats—a cross between a chocolate-ganache truffle and a gooey, fudgy brownie—grew out of Carla Hall's early days as a caterer. "They were easy to make in huge batches, and they looked effortlessly impressive," says Hall, now cohost of the ABC talk show *The Chew* and author of the new cookbook *Cooking with Love*. When she stopped catering, Hall continued baking the bites to give to friends. "There's a trail of thoughtfulness that goes into cooking for someone—thinking of them while you pick the recipe, buy the ingredients, select the perfect packaging," she says. "I think people can feel that extra love when they open the gift. And who doesn't like chocolate?"

For recipe, see page 174.



*Chocolate
Sauce*

**DESSERT TOPPING
QUARTET**

"Food gifts feel more meaningful to me than most store-bought things," says Barbara Lynch, the chef at five celebrated Boston restaurants, including No. 9 Park. "My favorites pack a double whammy: They encourage people to cook and make them feel like rock stars in the kitchen." These toppings can elevate almost any dessert, from a scoop of ice cream to a slice of pound cake. "I keep the serving suggestions really loose so nobody feels pressured," she says. "Like, the pineapple-vanilla topping pairs really well with snowy days."

*Candied
Praline Pecans*

*Pineapple Topping with
Vanilla and Rosemary*

Salted Caramel Sauce

2 cups sugar
1½ cups heavy cream
2 tsp. flaky sea salt, such as Maldon
1½ cups crème fraîche

In a medium saucepan, bring sugar and ½ cup water to a boil over medium-high heat. Continue to boil, without stirring, until just dark amber in color, 5 to 7 minutes more. Quickly remove saucepan from heat and carefully pour in heavy cream in a steady stream while whisking


constantly. Whisk in salt and set aside to let cool 10 minutes. Stir in crème fraîche and serve warm, or let cool and transfer to jars. Store in refrigerator up to 2 weeks and reheat before serving.

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS.

Active time: 15 minutes
Total time: 30 minutes

POLVORÓN

When a fellow cook introduced Anita Lo to polvorón, a Filipino milk candy, in the 1990s, she was instantly obsessed. "It's everything that everyone adores: malty and nutty, loaded with brown butter, with a melt-in-your-mouth texture," says Lo, chef-owner of Annisa in New York City. Later, during a year she spent traveling around the world, Lo stopped in the Philippines and learned to make the crumbly sweets, adding toasted walnuts to create her own version. (Her wrapping, though, is traditional: colorful waxed paper that's twisted at the ends.) "For me, food gifts tell a story—about a culture or about where you learned to make it or about what you love," Lo says.



$\frac{1}{4}$ cup walnuts
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
 $4\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp. malt-flavor Ovaltine powder
 $4\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp. nonfat dry milk
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Arrange walnuts on a baking sheet in a single layer and toast until golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool, then chop finely.
2. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, cook flour over medium-low heat, stirring often, until golden brown, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a large plate to let cool. Wipe skillet clean and return it to the stove. Add butter and cook over medium heat, without stirring, until fragrance is nutty and solids are golden brown, 4 to 5 minutes. Set aside to let cool.
3. In a large bowl, stir together reserved flour, Ovaltine powder, dry milk, sugar, and salt. Add reserved butter and vanilla, stir until smooth, and then stir in reserved walnuts. Using a tablespoon, press into small, round candies, and then turn out onto a large plate. Set aside in a cool, dry place until firm, about 4 hours. Wrap individually in waxed paper and store in an airtight container up to 2 weeks.

MAKES ABOUT 20 CANDIES.

Active time: 20 minutes

Total time: 5 hours

Adapted from *Cooking Without Borders*, by Anita Lo and Charlotte Druckman (Stewart, Tabori & Chang).

BACON AND CHEESE QUICK BREAD

You might expect a pastry chef to give sugary confections for the holidays, but Christina Tosi usually opts for savory. “At Christmastime, everyone is surrounded by sweets, so they crave something a little salty,” says the chef of Momofuku Milk Bar in New York City. Studded with smoky bacon, caramelized onions, and sharp Gruyère cheese, this quick bread has been Tosi’s go-to gift for the past few years. “Sometimes the easiest recipes are the most delicious,” she says. “For this, you literally mix wet and dry ingredients together—no kneading or rising involved.”


- 3 Tbsp. butter, plus more for greasing
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- ½ pound bacon (about 10 slices)
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 Tbsp. baking powder
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. ground black pepper
- 1 cup whole milk
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 egg
- ½ pound Gruyère cheese, shredded (about 2 cups)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Grease a 9" x 5" loaf pan (or four 6" x 2½" mini pans) with butter. In a large skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Add onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until deep golden brown and caramelized, about 30 minutes; set aside to let cool. Meanwhile, in a second large skillet, cook bacon over medium heat, turning occasionally, until crisp, about 10 minutes. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate, let cool, and then chop.

2. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, and pepper. In a medium bowl, whisk together milk, oil, and egg. Slowly pour milk mixture into flour mixture, stirring just until combined. Gently fold in cheese and reserved onions and bacon just until combined, and then transfer to prepared pan. Bake until golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 45 minutes (or 25 minutes for the smaller loaves). Set aside to let cool 15 minutes, then remove from pan to cool completely.

**MAKES ONE 9" LOAF OR
FOUR 6" LOAVES.**

Active time: 30 minutes

Total time: 1½ hours 

*Serve with Concord
grape jelly to enhance
the savory flavors.*





Spicy Pumpkin-Seed Brittle

Alton Brown's candy-making trick: heating the sugar syrup in a saucepan nestled in a cast-iron skillet so it cooks evenly. As with most brittle recipes, the key to this one's simplicity is in following the instructions carefully and using a candy thermometer.

- 1 tsp. vegetable oil, plus more for greasing
- 1½ cups (7¼ ounces) raw, hulled pumpkin seeds
- ½ tsp. cayenne
- ½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 3 cups (22 ounces) sugar

- 1.** Lightly grease an 18" x 12" jelly roll pan, the bottom of a second jelly roll pan, and a heatproof rubber spatula with oil. Arrange the first pan on trivets or a flat, heatproof surface.
- 2.** In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add pumpkin seeds and cook, stirring constantly, until toasted and fragrant, 4 to 5 minutes. (The seeds will crackle as they toast.) Transfer to a heatproof bowl; add cayenne, cinnamon, and salt and toss well. Set aside to let cool.
- 3.** Place a heavy, medium saucepan (3-quart or larger) inside a medium cast-iron skillet. Add sugar and 1½ cups water to saucepan and cook over high heat, gently stirring a few times with a wooden spoon, until syrup comes to a boil. Immediately cover pot with a tight-fitting lid and cook, without stirring or peeking, 3 minutes. Carefully uncover without dripping the lid's condensation into the pot. Reduce heat to medium-high and boil, without stirring, until mixture registers 350° on a candy thermometer and is light amber in color, about 30 minutes more.
- 4.** Quickly remove saucepan from heat, stir in pumpkin seeds, and pour onto the first prepared jelly roll pan. Still working quickly, use prepared spatula to spread mixture evenly into a thin layer, tilting pan to spread candy out as much as possible. (Hold the pan with a towel or oven mitt, since it will heat up after the candy is

poured onto it.) Top with second prepared pan and press to spread candy further. Let cool at room temperature 1 hour, and then give pan a tap on the counter to loosen candy. Using your hands, break brittle into pieces and store in an airtight container in a cool, dry place up to 2 weeks.

MAKES 1½ POUNDS.

Active time: 20 minutes

Total time: 2 hours

Glazed Holiday Cookies

- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1½ tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- ¾ cup vegetable shortening
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 5½ to 6½ Tbsp. whole milk, divided
- ½ tsp. finely grated orange or lemon zest
- ½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 egg plus egg yolks, divided
- Food coloring
- 1 (1-pound) box confectioners' sugar

- 1.** In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. In a large bowl, beat shortening and granulated sugar with an electric mixer on medium speed until well combined, about 1 minute. Add 1½ Tbsp. milk, zest, vanilla, and whole egg and beat until combined. Add flour mixture and beat on slow speed just until combined. Shape dough into 2 disks, cover each with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until cold, about 2 hours.
- 2.** Preheat oven to 375°. Line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper. Working on a floured surface, roll out 1 disk until about ¼" thick and use cookie cutters to cut into desired shapes. (Reroll scraps as needed.) Using a spatula, carefully transfer cookies to 1 of the prepared baking sheets.
- 3.** For each glaze color: In a small bowl, whisk together 1 egg yolk, 1 tsp. water, and 2 or 3 drops food coloring; repeat for more colors. Using your fingertips or a soft brush, paint tops of cookies with glaze and bake until set but not brown around the edges, about 8 minutes. Set aside to let cool,



An egg wash gives Ree Drummond's holiday cookies their vibrant color.

and meanwhile repeat with remaining disk of dough.

4. To make icing, whisk together confectioners' sugar and 4 Tbsp. milk, adding the remaining 1 Tbsp. milk, if needed, to make a thick but pipable icing. Transfer to a resealable plastic bag and snip off a bit of 1 corner to use for piping. Decorate cookies as desired and set aside to let dry before serving.

MAKES 2 TO 3 DOZEN COOKIES.

Active time: 1½ hours

Total time: 3½ hours

Chocolate Decadent Bites

Cake:

- ¾ pound (3 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into cubes, plus more for greasing
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ¾ pound bittersweet chocolate (58 percent cacao), chopped
- 1 tsp. instant espresso powder
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1½ cups sugar
- 9 eggs
- 2 Tbsp. vanilla extract
- 2 cups pecans or walnuts, toasted and finely chopped (optional)

Ganache:

- 1 pound semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 2 Tbsp. Grand Marnier, Frangelico, or Chambord (optional)

1. To make cake: Preheat oven to 350°. Butter an 18" x 12" jelly roll pan and line the bottom with parchment paper. Butter the parchment and dust the bottom and sides with flour, tapping out the excess.

2. In a small pot, melt butter and bittersweet chocolate over medium-low heat, stirring often, until smooth, 4 to 5 minutes. Stir

in espresso powder and set aside to let cool to room temperature.

3. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour and salt. In a large bowl, beat sugar and eggs with an electric mixer on medium speed until thick and pale yellow, 3 to 4 minutes. Add vanilla and beat again until combined. Reduce speed to low and gradually add flour mixture, beating just until combined. Add melted-chocolate mixture in a steady stream, beating until thoroughly blended, and then stir in nuts, if using. Transfer to prepared pan, smooth out evenly, and bake until a toothpick inserted near the edge comes out clean, about 25 minutes. Set aside to let cool completely.

4. Meanwhile, make ganache: Place semisweet chocolate in a large, heatproof bowl. In a small pot, heat heavy cream until steaming, pour over chocolate, and stir gently until smooth. Stir in liqueur, if using. Set aside to let cool to room temperature; alternatively, chill uncovered, stirring occasionally, until thickened but not set, 1 to 2 hours.

5. Invert cake onto a clean surface, peel off and discard parchment paper, and halve crosswise to make 2 (9" x 12") pieces. Invert 1 piece onto a wire rack set over a sheet tray. Spread with a generous layer of ganache, then top with the remaining cake, again inverted so that it sits right side up. Use remaining ganache to cover the top and sides evenly and chill, uncovered, until set, at least 2 hours and up to 2 days. Cut into bite-size squares and keep chilled until ready to serve.

MAKES ABOUT 40 PIECES.

Active time: 1 hour

Total time: 4½ hours

Recipe adapted from Cooking with Love, by Carla Hall with Genevieve Ko (Free Press). **O**