

Baker #15 - Jolyn Leslie

Hello Dolly Cookies

Story:

This recipe comes from my husband's family. It has been a staple of their Christmas cookie trays since about the mid-1960's and has been passed down now through 4 generations since his maternal grandma first discovered the recipe in the St. Louis Post Dispatch (June 19, 1966). It's his most favorite Christmas cookie, out of the more than dozen or so varieties that gets made every year at Christmas. It was his idea to add sea salt to help temper the richness and sweetness of the cookies. Even though they are very easy to make (I can get them mixed up and out of the oven cooling in less than an hour), they are also very rich and sweet and are only made for the holidays. In 2003, it made the family cookbook that was put together by my husband's cousin and included all the favorite recipes from all the family members. The recipe has traveled quite far from St. Louis and is now staple here in Washington, also in Wisconsin, Illinois, Arkansas, and Washington DC. It even made a brief appearance in the Netherlands when my brother-in-law lived there!

Recipe:

Recipe makes 24 bars in a 9x9-inch pan (double all ingredients for a larger batch in a 9x13-inch baking dish, you may need to extend the baking time by 5-10 minutes until the top is golden brown).

- 1-1/2 cup graham cracker crumbs (crushed from whole graham crackers – you can use a food processor or crush them in a plastic bag with a rolling pin)
- 6 Tablespoons melted butter, plus additional butter as needed for greasing baking pan
- 1 cup dark chocolate chips (you can also substitute semi-sweet chocolate chips or use a mix of both)
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 1 cup sweetened flake coconut
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 teaspoon flaky sea salt

Preheat oven to 350 F. Grease a 9x9 baking pan with butter making sure to cover the sides as well as the bottom (alternatively, you can make a sling out of parchment paper).

Mix together crushed graham crackers and melted butter and press mixture firmly into the bottom of the prepared pan (I like to use the discarded butter wrapper to do this). Drizzle about half of the condensed milk over the crumb layer. Next sprinkle chocolate chips evenly over, followed by the chopped nuts and coconut over the top. Drizzle the remaining sweetened condensed milk evenly over the top. You don't need to cover the top completely with the condensed milk – you should see bits of the ingredients showing through.

Place pan in preheated oven. Bake for 30 minutes or until the top is golden brown. Immediately after taking it out of the oven, sprinkle the flaky sea salt evenly over the top.

Cool on rack and invert and remove from pan. Turn it over again so that the coconut is on top. After it is completely cooled, use a very sharp knife to cut it into rectangular pieces (4 rows by 6 rows gives you nice-size rectangular cookie bars)(for the 9x13 size pan, 4 rows by 9 rows works well).