

## Community Loaves Baker - Anna Fine

(Updated 11/30/2023)

### Holiday Shortbread Squares - 2023 Competition Winner

Her Story: When simplicity was emphasized in this challenge, my mind quickly went to toffee bars from my mother-in-law's kitchen. She was born in Germany and emigrated to the US to marry the soldier who stole her heart while stationed in her hometown. Perhaps because she was far from her own family, my in-laws were quick to embrace friends as chosen family and loved to host others at their home. In search of a theme for a summer party, my mother-in-law remembered the festive celebration of Swiss Independence Day during the year she worked in Switzerland before leaving Europe, and the annual Swiss Party was born. Held on or around August 1, new guests often raised the question of who the Swiss became independent from, but the answer quickly became irrelevant once surrounded by oompah-pah music, Swiss flags and an amazing spread of food. On the dessert table you could always find these toffee bars - rich shortbread topped with chocolate and almonds. I was an immediate fan, and even more so when I learned how easy they were to make! Replacing chopped almonds with holiday sprinkles flipped this from a summer treat to a December delight to be shared with friends who are family.

#### Ingredients:

- 227 grams brown sugar (1 cup)
- 290 grams Trailblazer bread flour (2 cups) (Sequoia, Glacier Peak, Organic Artisan Espresso are all good substitutes)
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- 227 grams chilled salted butter (1 cup) - cut into ½ inch cubes
- 340 grams (2 cups) semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 88 grams homemade peppermint candy crunch - 7-8 medium size candy canes. You can purchase crunch already made - several brands - India Tree, Brachs, Hammonds Peppermint Frost, but it is very easy to make! Here are two videos for reference: [video 1](#), and [video 2](#).
- Flake Sea Salt, like Maldon - Sprinkling

#### Preparation:

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Line a [9x13 pan](#) with parchment paper, ensuring the paper comes up the short sides of the pan allowing you to lift the cookies out after they are baked.

#### Mix Dough - Choose By Hand or Food Processor:

##### By Hand:

- In a large bowl, combine sugar and flour and mix thoroughly with fork. Set aside.
- In a small bowl, stir together egg yolk, vanilla extract, then add this to the sugar/flour mixture and mix thoroughly with a fork.
- Now cut-in butter using a pastry cutter or two knives and until the mixture resembles coarse wet sand.

### **With Food Processor:**

- Combine sugar and flour in bowl of processor - pulse to incorporate (approx. 6 1-second pulses)
- Mix vanilla extract and egg yolk in a small bowl - add to sugar/flour mixture and pulse to incorporate (approx. 3 1-second pulses)
- Add butter cubes to the bowl and process until mixture resembles wet sand (approx. 12-14 1-second pulses)

### **Final Steps:**

- Press dough firmly into prepared pan. The bottom of a measuring cup works well to help even this out. You want a uniform thickness across the pan.
- Bake for 20 minutes. Remove from oven and immediately sprinkle chocolate chips evenly over top of cookie.
- When chips become shiny (approximately 2 minutes), carefully spread melted chips evenly using offset spatula or spoon.
- Top with sprinkles and lightly add a sprinkling of flake salt to finish. I covered half the pan with peppermint and half with holly to make 2 different cookies in the same pan.
- Cool thoroughly before lifting parchment out of the pan and slicing cookie with sharp chef knife into 1 ½ inch squares. *Note: You can chill the pan in the refrigerator for 30-45 minutes for an optimal consistency for clean slicing.*
- *You can use a ruler to help keep things even, or to help you find your midpoints. The goal is 48 equal size pieces. You can trim the edges by ¼" to neaten up the edges if you need, and to earn a few nibbles, but this isn't necessary. (Note, the video with Ana, we didn't bother with trimming or measuring beyond cutting the long side in half, then each half in half, and repeat to get four equal columns. Then we created 6 columns on the short side. That gets you 6 x 8 = 48 squares.*
- **We're packing 16 cookies per box.**

Yield: 48 squares

### **Additional Notes:**

- This recipe freezes beautifully. Once cut into individual squares, freeze them collectively in a large tupperware. Or alternatively, package them in their gift boxes and throw the entire box in the freezer. Remove on Donation Sunday.