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Crunchy Holiday Treats!

By Susie Iventosch



With the holidays rapidly approaching, it's time to think about baking cookies and making candy as little gifts for teachers, friends, granddads and stocking stuffers. I just love homemade toffee, but never had much luck making my own ... must have missed that chemistry lesson! Recently, though, a friend gave me her recipe for English toffee, which she said is fool-proof. Just like magic, it worked perfectly the first time I tried it. Don't ask about the second and third times. Those were a disaster with the result being a soft, crumbly, un-presentable mess.

Apparently, the candy had not reached the hard crack stage, which can be tricky, because you don't want to cook it so long that it burns. After a little research, I went back for a fourth attempt, this time taking the candy through the hard crack stage and cooking it there for a bit longer than my instincts told me to, but not long enough to get much past 310 on the candy thermometer. This time it worked very well, and the result is delicious!

If you have the desire to try to make candy on your own, here are recipes for the English toffee and peanut brittle. But, if you don't feel that urge, you can always trek down to Loard's Ice Cream & Candies in Orinda or Moraga, and purchase from their beautiful selection of sweets. They also sell adorable ice cream snowballs, made to order with your choice of ice cream and toppings, and adorned with holly and a candle. These festive little treats go for \$3 apiece.

Loard's has been at the Orinda location for 56 years, and according to current owner Brooks Stubblefield, the ice cream is still made in small batches at the San Leandro factory. The Loard's process uses minimal whipped air producing a denser,

creamier ice cream, which is available in some 60 flavors. It could take a while to study this fabulous selection of flavors before deciding on your custom snowballs, but don't let it deter you, they are really fun! Please call or stop by the store to place special orders.

Loard's Ice Cream & Candies
230 Brookwood Road, Orinda
Phone: (925) 254-3434
560 Center Street, Moraga
(Rheem Shopping Center)
Phone: (925) 376-3431



English Toffee

Ingredients 1 cup butter (salted or unsalted)

1 1/3 cup sugar (use only pure cane sugar)

1 tablespoon light corn syrup

3 tablespoons water

1 cup finely chopped, blanched and toasted slivered almonds

(Trader Joe's carries unsalted, dry-toasted slivered almonds, which are perfect for this.)

12 ounces melted Ghirardelli 60% Cacao Bittersweet chocolate chips

Directions

- Place butter, sugar, water and corn syrup in large saucepan and cook over low heat until butter is melted.

- Increase heat to medium-high and continue to cook, stirring constantly. The mixture will foam up

and increase in volume as the water is cooked off.

- Once the water is cooked off, the mixture will collapse and begin to thicken. As this happens the temperature will begin to rise.

- Continue to cook and stir, until mixture reaches the "hard crack" stage. There is some variation on what hard crack temperature really is, but I take it to between 305-310 degrees on the candy thermometer and remove it from heat source before it can reach 320. The candy will change to a slightly darker color just as it is ready to take off the heat, but be careful not to overcook, as it will burn and separate. And, if the mixture doesn't reach the hard crack stage, the toffee will be very soft and crumbly rather than crunchy. This is the hardest part!

- Remove pan from heat and immediately spread mixture into a

greased (or PAM'd) 9x13-inch baking dish.

Use a silicon spatula to even out. Cool thoroughly.

- When completely cool, spread top with half of the melted chocolate and press half of the almonds into the chocolate. Again allow to cool completely. This will take about 30 minutes.

- Place waxed paper over toffee, and invert. Then spread remaining chocolate on the second side and press remaining nuts into the chocolate. Allow to cool completely again, so chocolate is solid.

- Break into pieces and store in a secret hiding spot as fast as you can! (Lots of nuts will fall off as you break it, but store them along with toffee for snitching!)



Peanut Brittle

Ingredients

1 cup sugar

1 cup light corn syrup

12-14 ounces raw Spanish peanuts, skins on is fine
(can usually find in bulk food section)

2 tablespoons butter

1 teaspoon vanilla

2 teaspoons baking soda

Directions

Mix sugar and syrup in heavy skillet. Add peanuts and cook over medium heat until mixture is golden-brown (amber) in color and peanuts begin to pop, approximately 15-20 minutes, or until candy thermometer reaches hard crack stage (approximately 305 degrees.) Remove from heat and add vanilla and butter. Stir in baking soda and pour mixture into buttered jelly roll tin. Cool and crack. This candy sets up immediately.

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