

Almond Cherry Pepita Bars



Recipe courtesy of Food Network Kitchen



This completely plant based fruit-and-nut snack has a light and chewy texture that comes from brown rice cereal and syrup. Dried cherries give it a burst of sweet-tart flavor that is balanced by flaky sea salt, almonds and pepitas. Wrap them individually for a satisfying snack that can be made ahead and taken on the go or packed in school lunches. ...

Level: Easy**Total:** 1 hr 45 min (includes chilling time)**Active:** 20 min**Yield:** 12 servings

Ingredients:

Nonstick cooking spray
2 cups crispy brown rice cereal
1 cup raw pepitas
1 cup raw almonds, roughly chopped
1/2 cup sweetened dried cherries
2/3 cup brown rice syrup
2 tablespoons almond butter
1/2 teaspoon almond extract
1/2 teaspoon flaky sea salt

Directions:

- 1 Preheat an oven to 325 degrees F. Coat an 8-inch square glass baking dish with cooking spray. Line the bottom with a piece of parchment or waxed paper leaving a 4-inch overhang on two opposite sides and spray the paper with cooking spray.
- 2 Put 1 cup of the rice cereal in a resealable plastic bag and crush to a fine powder with the back of the measuring cup. Combine the remaining 1 cup rice cereal, pepitas, almonds and cherries in a large bowl. Heat the rice syrup and almond butter in a small saucepan until warm and bubbling and remove from heat. Stir in the almond extract and salt, and pour into the nut mixture. Fold with a spatula until it is everything is moistened and well combined. Add the crushed rice cereal and continue to fold until evenly incorporated.
- 3 Press the mixture very firmly and evenly into the prepared pan using the overhanging pieces of parchment to prevent sticking. Bake until beginning to brown, about 25 minutes. Cool 15 minutes on a wire rack, then press again to compact the mixture. Chill until firm but not completely set, about 45 minutes. Remove the block by the paper handles and invert onto a cutting board. Gently peel off the paper. Cut the block in half, then cut each half into 6 bars for 12 total. Refrigerate until fully set.
- 4 Store the bars individually wrapped or layered between sheets of parchment or waxed paper in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. The bars will soften up and become chewy as they come to room temperature.

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