

PECAN TURTLE COOKIE BARS

Between the buttery shortbread crust, caramel-like pecan filling, and chocolate topping, it's hard to choose a favorite part of these three-layer cookie bars. If you like turtles—meaning, the candy—then you'll flip for these!

PREP TIME: 45 minutes

TOTAL TIME: 3 hours 45 minutes

YIELD: 24 bars

Crust

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup (1½ sticks, or 180 g) unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (170 g) packed brown sugar
1¾ cups (210 g) all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon salt

Filling and Topping

14-ounce (397 g) can full-fat sweetened condensed milk
2 tablespoons (30 g) unsalted butter
1¾ cups (190 g) chopped pecans, divided
2 (4 ounces, or 113 g, each) bars milk or semi-sweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
coarse sea salt, for topping (optional)

MAKE-AHEAD TIP

The best way to make these bars in advance is to freeze them. Layer the cut baked bars between sheets of parchment paper and arrange them in a plastic container or freezer bag. Freeze for up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator and, if desired, bring to room temperature before serving.

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a 9 × 13-inch (23 × 33 cm) baking pan with parchment paper, leaving enough overhang around the sides to easily lift out the contents. (I encourage using parchment for this recipe so that you can easily remove the confection as a whole and not cut into bars while in the pan.) Set aside.
2. **To make the crust:** In a large bowl, using a handheld mixer or a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter on medium-high speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Add the brown sugar and beat on medium-high speed until creamed, about 2 minutes. Add the flour, vanilla extract, and salt, and beat on medium speed until combined, about 1 minute. Scrape down the sides and up the bottom of the bowl and beat again as needed to combine. The dough will be soft and thick.
3. Press the dough evenly into the prepared baking pan. Bake for 15 minutes, or until the top and edges are lightly browned. Remove from the oven and allow to cool slightly as you prepare the filling. Do not turn off the oven.
4. **To make the filling:** Combine the sweetened condensed milk and butter in a medium heatproof bowl. Microwave for 1 minute, then stir to ensure the butter is completely melted. If not, microwave for 10 more seconds. Stir in 1½ cups (165 g) of the pecans. Pour evenly over the crust.
5. Bake for 16 to 17 minutes, until the filling is bubbling and light brown. Remove from the oven and allow to cool slightly.
6. Melt the chopped chocolate in a double boiler or in the microwave in 15-second increments, stopping and stirring after each until completely smooth. Pour on top of the bars and gently spread to coat the entire pan. Sprinkle with remaining ¼ cup (25 g) pecans and, if desired, sea salt.
7. Allow to cool in the pan. Once completely cooled, remove the confection from the pan by picking it up with the overhanging parchment paper. Cut into squares. Note: if shortbread is not completely cool, the bars will fall apart when cutting.
8. Bars will stay fresh in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 2 days or in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

