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## Almond Granola with Dried Fruit

### WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Store-bought granola suffers from many shortcomings. It's often loose and gravelly and/or infuriatingly expensive. We wanted to make our own granola at home, with big, satisfying clusters and crisp texture. The secret was to firmly pack the granola mixture into a rimmed baking sheet before baking. Once it was baked, we had a granola "bark" that we could break into crunchy clumps of any size.

### Makes about 9 cups

Chopping the almonds by hand is the first choice for superior texture and crunch. If you prefer not to hand chop, substitute an equal quantity of slivered or sliced almonds. (A food processor does a lousy job of chopping whole nuts evenly.) Use a single type of your favorite dried fruit or a combination. Do not use quick oats.

### INGREDIENTS

- 1/3** cup maple syrup
- 1/3** cup packed (2 1/3 ounces) light brown sugar
- 4** teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/2** teaspoon salt
- 1/2** cup vegetable oil
- 5** cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 2** cups (10 ounces) raw almonds, chopped coarse
- 2** cups raisins or other dried fruit, chopped

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
- 2.** Whisk maple syrup, brown sugar, vanilla, and salt in large bowl. Whisk in oil. Fold in oats and almonds until thoroughly coated.
- 3.** Transfer oat mixture to prepared baking sheet and spread across sheet into thin, even layer (about 3/8 inch thick). Using stiff metal spatula, compress oat mixture until very compact. Bake until lightly browned, 40 to 45 minutes, rotating pan once halfway through baking. Remove granola from oven and cool on wire rack to room temperature, about 1 hour. Break cooled granola into pieces of desired size. Stir in dried fruit. (Granola can be stored in airtight container for up to 2 weeks.)

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### TECHNIQUE

## GRANOLA GONE WRONG

Most store-bought granola is so bad (and so overpriced), we're surprised anyone ever buys it.

Without oil to provide moisture, fat-free versions contain dry, dusty oats. Baked with the other ingredients, dried fruit turns tough and leathery. Loose oats, versus chunks, too readily absorb the milk or yogurt and turn soggy.

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### TECHNIQUE

#### KEYS TO CHUNKIER GRANOLA

##### **PRESS DOWN**

Spread oat mixture onto parchment-lined baking sheet. Press it firmly with spatula to create compact layer.

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##### **BAKE BUT DON'T STIR**

Bake granola at 325 degrees for 40 to 45 minutes. Rotate pan halfway through baking but don't stir.

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##### **BREAK UP**

Break cooled granola "bark" into pieces as large as you'd like.

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### TECHNIQUE

#### FOR BETTER GRANOLA, ADD FAT

When we mixed up a batch of granola in which we left out the oil, the resulting cereal was a real flop, the oats having taken on a crisp but overly dry consistency. It turns out that fat is essential for creating a likable crispness.

Here's why: When the water in a viscous liquid sweetener (like the maple syrup in our recipe) evaporates in the heat of the oven, the sugars left behind develop into a thin coating on the oats and nuts. But without any fat, the sugar coating will become brittle and dry. Only oil can provide a pleasantly crisp coating with a sense of moistness.