

Chocolate fruit and nut bars

Makes 18 (4 1/2-by-1-inch) bars

8 ounces dark, bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
2 tablespoons maple syrup
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 teaspoons vanilla
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 cups mixed, unsalted, raw nuts and seeds such as pistachios, cashews, and pumpkin seeds
1/2 cup dried cranberries, raisins or chopped dried fruit of your choosing

1. Set the oven at 350 degrees. Line a 9-by-13-inch baking pan with a parchment paper rectangle that is 9 inches wide and slightly longer than the pan. The parchment should fit on the bottom and extend up the two short sides of the pan. Line a baking sheet with parchment.
2. Spread the chocolate evenly over the bottom of the lined baking pan and bake for 3 minutes, or until the chocolate melts. Remove from the oven, and use a small offset spatula to spread it in a thin layer over the bottom of the pan. Cool for 5 minutes. Freeze for 10 minutes, or until firm. Remove from the freezer.
3. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, mix the maple syrup, oil, vanilla and salt. Add the nuts and stir to coat them. Spread them on the parchment-lined baking sheet, and bake for 8 to 10 minutes, or until the nuts are browned and fragrant. Remove them from the oven and cool for 2 minutes.
4. Sprinkle the warm nuts and the dried fruit evenly over the chocolate. Place the parchment sheet you used for the nuts on top of the bars and press firmly with your hands to embed them into the chocolate. The chocolate will start melting from the heat of the nuts. (If it does not, return the pan to the oven for 1 minute.) Freeze for 10 minutes, or until the chocolate hardens.
5. Using the parchment paper ends as handles, lift the chocolate out of the baking pan in one piece and place it on a cutting board with the short side parallel to the edge of the board. Use a sharp, heavy knife to cut the chocolate in half lengthwise. Make 1-inch cuts across the halves to make a total of 18 bars. Store in a cool place in an airtight tin between layers of waxed paper.

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