

Homemade Granola Bars

a recipe from www.maureenabood.com

This recipe is adapted from Ina Garten's rather famous granola bars. The ingredients are remarkably flexible. In other words: have it your way! Ramp up the healthy quotient by using agave rather than honey and brown sugar. Replace toasted wheat germ (it comes already toasted) with flaxseed (but best not to leave one or the other out; it's an important binding element). Use any dried fruit and nut combo you like. If coconut isn't your thing, just add more oats instead. The number of bars from this depends on how they're cut; I made 15 rectangular bars.

2 cups old-fashioned oatmeal
1 cup sliced almonds
1 cup shredded coconut, loosely packed
½ cup toasted wheat germ
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2/3 cup honey
¼ cup light brown sugar, lightly packed
1 ½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
½ cup chopped pitted dates
½ cup chopped dried apricots
½ cup dried cherries

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter the bottom of a 9x13x2-inch baking pan. Line the pan with parchment, making a parchment 'sling'—leaving an inch or two of parchment overhang on the two longer sides of the pan. This will allow for easy removal of the granola bars after they're baked by pulling the parchment and granola out of the pan together.

Toss the oatmeal, almonds, and coconut together on a sheet pan and bake for 10 to 12 minutes, stirring occasionally, until golden brown. Transfer the mixture to a large mixing bowl. Stir in the wheat germ.

Reduce the oven temperature to 300 degrees F.

Place the butter, honey, brown sugar, vanilla, and salt in a small saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat. Cook and stir for a minute, then pour over the toasted oatmeal mixture. Be sure to do this when the butter mixture and the oat mixture are both warm, for better binding. Add the dates, apricots, and cranberries and stir well.

Pour the mixture into the prepared pan. Wet the palms of your hands and press, press, press the mixture evenly into the pan. Wet your hands again as they become sticky. Be sure to press with all of your force so that the bars become compact and will hold together.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until light golden brown. Cool for at least 2 to 3 hours before cutting into squares. Pack individually wrapped in parchment, plastic wrap, or waxed paper to take on the run, or on a trip.