

FOOD & WINE

Crunch Time

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WINES TO
SIP, POUR, AND
PAIR WITH

Chocolate Toffee Bar Brownies

Maida Heatter's foolproof recipes made millions of home cooks better bakers.

By David McCann



◆ Roughly chop the pecans and candy bars for the best crunch in the brownie topping (recipe p. 98).

THE BEST TEACHERS feel like good friends. They may know more than you do, but they never make fun of you for asking questions. They believe knowledge should be shared, and they want you to achieve as much as you can. When it comes to baking, the most scientific form of cooking, my best teachers have been tenacious, encouraging, and exacting, while still reminding me to have fun. I found all of these qualities and more in the legendary Maida Heatter, my best teacher in all things baking. To my great sadness, I never met Ms. Heatter, who died in 2019 at the age of 102, but my decades of using her recipes and cookbooks as touchstones, reference books, and inspirational texts allow me to consider her a close companion.



IN THIS ISSUE

Heatter's feature on bar cookies was in the March 1995 issue of F&W, just before her *Brand-New Book of Great Cookies* was published.

Heatter was a completely self-taught baker who launched her culinary career because she wanted to share her exceptional baked goods with the world. Her fearlessness helped take her from owning a coffee shop outside of Miami to authoring several cookbooks and placing her recipes in national publications (including this one). She was never afraid of a little self-promotion. After publishing her first cookbook in 1974 at age 58, she carried a purse full of brownies and bar cookies and would hand them out to people; when they asked her for the recipe, she'd point them to her book.

Her hustle might have propelled her into the limelight, but it was her rigorous recipe testing,

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approachable writing and teaching style, and ability to inspire home bakers that made her a legend. Her recipes always work exactly as written, enabling novice bakers to achieve great results on the first try and emboldening them to bake again. And while her recipes are precise and exacting, they are by no means academic or dry. When introducing her recipe for these Chocolate Toffee Bar Brownies in the March 1995 issue of F&W, at a time when counting every calorie was the moral high ground, Heatter opened with the following: "In the immortal words of Mae West, 'Too much of a good thing can be wonderful.'" She jubilantly layered toffee candy with pecans and chocolate to yield buttery and rich brownies. The sheer deliciousness of this and other desserts forever cemented a place for Heatter in the hearts of all of us who love sweet treats.

Despite her acclaim, Heatter's spirit always stayed the same. After accruing multiple James Beard Awards for her cookbooks, she was recognized by the foundation's Cookbook Hall of Fame in 1998. While accepting her award at the age of 82, she famously flung handfuls of brownies (carefully wrapped, of course) into the adoring crowd.

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Chocolate Toffee Bar Brownies

PHOTO P. 100

ACTIVE 30 MIN; TOTAL 3 HR
MAKES 2 DOZEN

These brownies from cookbook author Maida Heatter deliver fudgy richness with a chewy surprise. Buttery chocolate-covered toffee bits melt as the brownies bake, leaving deep pockets of caramelized candy for extra sweetness and texture. Enjoy these chocolaty treats on their own, or serve with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

- 1/2 cup plus 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter, divided**
- 3/4 cup pecan halves**
- 2 oz. unsweetened chocolate**
- 1 1/2 cups chocolate-covered toffee candy bars (such as Heath) (about 5 candy bars), cut into 1/4- to 1/2-inch pieces, divided**
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar**
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature**
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt**
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract**
- 1 cup sifted all-purpose flour (about 4 oz.)**

1. Preheat oven to 350°F with oven rack in bottom third position. Line bottom of an 8-inch square baking pan with aluminum foil, allowing foil to extend about 2 inches over 2 opposite sides of pan. Place 1

tablespoon butter in pan; transfer pan to preheated oven, and heat until butter is melted, about 3 minutes. Remove pan from oven; spread melted butter evenly over foil using a pastry brush. Set buttered pan aside. Toast pecans in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet in oven at 350°F until fragrant, 10 to 12 minutes. Set pecans aside. (Do not turn oven off.)

2. Combine chocolate and remaining 1/2 cup butter in a small heatproof bowl. Microwave on HIGH until melted, about 1 minute and 30 seconds, stopping to stir every 15 seconds (see Note). Let cool slightly, about 5 minutes.

3. Using a chef's knife, coarsely chop 1/4 cup toasted pecans and 1/4 cup candy bar pieces. Combine chopped pecans and candy bar pieces in a small bowl, and set aside until ready to use.

4. Beat sugar, eggs, salt, and vanilla in a medium bowl with an electric mixer on medium speed until combined, about 30 seconds. Beat in melted chocolate mixture until fully incorporated, about 45 seconds. Reduce mixer speed to low; beat in flour until just incorporated, about 45 seconds, stopping to scrape sides of bowl as needed. Stir in remaining 1/4 cups candy bar pieces and remaining 1/2 cup toasted pecans using a wooden spoon. Spread batter evenly in prepared pan.

5. Sprinkle reserved chopped candy bar pieces and chopped toasted pecans evenly over batter. Bake at 350°F until brownie edges start to pull away from sides of pan and a wooden pick inserted in center is mostly clean (there will be a few bits of melted chocolate), 25 to 28 minutes. Transfer pan to a wire rack; let stand until brownies are set, about 45 minutes.

6. Lift brownies from pan using foil overhang as handles; peel off and discard foil. Refrigerate brownies until completely cool, about 1 hour. Slice evenly into 24 pieces. —MAIDA HEATTER

MAKE AHEAD Brownies can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature up to 4 days. To freeze, wrap individual brownie squares in plastic wrap, and store in a single layer in an airtight container in freezer up to 1 month.

NOTE Alternatively, you can melt chocolate and butter together on the stovetop in a small heatproof bowl set over a pot of gently simmering water. (The water should not come in contact with the bottom of the bowl.) Cook, stirring often, until chocolate and butter are smooth and melted.

