

Eggnog Cheesecake Streusel Bars



Makes about 2 dozen (1¾-inch) squares

Spiked with the familiar flavors of eggnog and loaded with buttery cocoa streusel, this luscious cheesecake-cookie is guaranteed to draw big crowds.

Note: Never substitute pre-ground nutmeg for freshly grated, as the former can be harsh and bitter. For a plain vanilla version for kids, omit the grated nutmeg, bourbon, and rum extract in the cheesecake and increase the vanilla extract to 2 teaspoons.

Prep Talk: For easiest cutting, chill at least 2 hours before slicing. Because the bars are perishable, they must be stored in the fridge. Bars will stay fresh longer if kept in the pan, tightly wrapped in foil, and cut just before serving. For best flavor and texture, serve at room temperature within 2 to 3 days, before the streusel softens.

Ingredients: Cocoa Streusel Crust (and Topping)

2 cups plus 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour, divided
1 cup plus 3 tablespoons firmly packed light brown sugar, divided
4 tablespoons unsweetened non-alkalized cocoa powder, divided
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup (2 sticks) plus 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened and divided
1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

Ingredients: Eggnog Cheesecake Filling

2 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, room temperature
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
2 large eggs, room temperature
2½ teaspoons bourbon
1½ teaspoons freshly grated nutmeg, or to taste
1 teaspoon rum extract
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ cup premium milk chocolate chips (for topping)
1¼ cups pecan halves, lightly toasted, cooled, and coarsely chopped (for topping)

Ingredients: Caramel Drizzle (optional)

4 ounces caramel candies (about 14 cubes)

2 tablespoons heavy cream

½ tablespoon unsalted butter

Instructions

1. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 350° F. Line a 9 x 13 x 2-inch baking pan with foil, leaving a 1-inch overhang around the top edge of the pan. Smooth out any big wrinkles in the foil; then lightly coat the foil with nonstick cooking spray.

2. **Mix the Cocoa Streusel Crust.** In a medium bowl, combine 1¼ cups plus 3 tablespoons flour, ¼ cup plus 3 tablespoons brown sugar, 2 tablespoons cocoa powder, and the salt. Using a fork or your hands, thoroughly work in ¾ cup plus 1 tablespoon butter until you have a moist dough. (There should be no dry spots.) Press the dough firmly into an even layer in the bottom of the pan. Prick generously with a fork.

3. Bake the crust about 15 minutes, or until set but still soft. (The top will look dull and ever so slightly puffed.) Transfer to a wire rack and cool completely before filling.

4. **Make the Cocoa Streusel Topping.** Combine the remaining ¾ cup flour, ¾ cup brown sugar, 2 tablespoons cocoa powder, and nutmeg in a small bowl. Work in the remaining 6 tablespoons butter until the dry ingredients are uniformly moistened. (The mixture will be crumbly, but there should be no dry spots.) Set aside for use in Step 6.

5. **Mix the Eggnog Cheesecake Filling.** Place the cream cheese in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Beat on medium speed until smooth and creamy, less than 1 minute. Gradually add the sugar and continue to beat until the sugar has dissolved, about 1 minute. (You should feel no grit when you smear a bit of batter between your fingers.) Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. To keep the batter completely smooth, scrape down the sides of the bowl regularly. Turn the mixer to low speed and add the bourbon, nutmeg, and extracts. Mix until well blended.

6. Pour the filling onto the cooled crust and spread into an even layer. Sprinkle the streusel topping evenly over the filling, followed by the chocolate chips and pecans. Gently press the toppings into the cheesecake.

7. Bake the cheesecake about 30 minutes, or until slightly puffed and firm through to the center. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

8. **Prepare the Caramel Drizzle (optional).** Unwrap the caramel candies and combine them with the cream and butter in a small nonreactive (stainless steel or coated) saucepan. Set over medium-low heat and stir regularly until the caramels are melted and the mixture is well blended. Drizzle 3 to 4 tablespoons over the top of the cheesecake.

9. Cover the pan and refrigerate at least 2 hours.

10. Remove the cheesecake from the pan in one block by gently pulling up on the foil overhang or by easing the block out with an offset spatula. Place directly on a cutting board and remove all foil. Trim any uneven edges before cutting the block into 1¾-inch squares. For the neatest cuts, use a sharp knife, wiped clean with a warm, damp cloth between slices. (If the chocolate chips are difficult to cut, heat the knife blade directly over a hot burner before cutting.)

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