



1840 Farm

HOT COCOA AND MARSHMALLOW COOKIE BARS



We're deep in the grasp of winter here at the farmhouse. I don't mind winter. This is the one season of the year when I don't need to fit abundant outdoor chores into my days. As long as the animals are tended to, I can turn my focus to working on projects inside the farmhouse (there are always plenty of those), working on new recipes, writing, sewing, and knitting.

This is the time of the year when I can take a deep breath and nest a bit. I like to nest and I firmly believe that cozy is underrated. Give me a pair of warm PJs, a heavy blanket, a cup of hot tea, and Penny Lane on the couch in front of the pellet stove on a winter day and I am cozy, content, and in the place I belong.

Winter in New England does bring with it a fair share of snow to contend with. When my children were younger, they loved our snowy days. While my parents and I removed the snow from the drive and paths, they would happily play in the big snow pile we created for them. Laughter filled the air and they would play outside until they could barely muster up the energy to lift their tired legs to carry heavy snow laden boots and tromp back inside. Those were the best sort of winter days.

Now that they're older, they pitch in to help with the chore of clearing the snow. Everyone staffs the snow throwers or grabs a shovel and gets to work. I'm grateful for their help. Many hands really does make the work go faster and certainly make the chore seem lighter.

Last winter, we decided to bring back a bit of the joy of a snow day when we were clearing snow. We get to work and get the snow cleared first. Then everyone lingers outside for a bit, takes a walk into the woods to explore, or just enjoys the beauty of a landscape covered with a fresh blanket of snow, the special stillness that exists right after a new snowfall.

I still keep up a food tradition I started when the kids were little. I always make a pot of homemade hot chocolate to warm them up when we come inside. I started making homemade hot chocolate nearly two decades ago when food allergies made it nearly impossible for me to buy hot chocolate mix or packets at the grocery store. When I couldn't buy it, I made it myself. It's a flavor of their childhood, one that I wanted to hold on to.

That homemade hot chocolate was the inspiration for this recipe for Hot Cocoa and Marshmallow Cookie Bars. They have the same deliciously rich chocolate flavor studded with marshmallows and marshmallow fluff for good measure. In my opinion, a great hot chocolate can never have too many marshmallows, so I made sure that these bars had plenty.

These bars have become a part of our new tradition on snowy days. They come together quickly and are so indulgent and delicious. They are fudgy and gooey and just perfect for warming up after being out in the cold. I hope that they will be a new snowy day tradition that we'll keep up for years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping tail.

HOT COCOA AND MARSHMALLOW COOKIE BARS

These bars deliver the same comfort of a steaming mug of rich hot chocolate topped with marshmallows. They're flavorful, gooey, and the perfect treat on a wintry day.

Makes: 12 - 16 bars

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Cooling Time: 30 minutes

Baking Time: 30 minutes

Total Time: 90 minutes

Ingredients

½ cup (4 ounces) butter
½ cup (4 ounces) cream cheese, cubed
½ cup (60 grams) unsweetened cocoa powder
½ cup (100 grams) granulated sugar
½ cup (100 grams) brown sugar
½ cup (50 grams) dry milk powder
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¾ teaspoon kosher salt
2 ½ cups (300 grams) All-purpose flour
¼ cup (30 grams) cornstarch
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup (170 grams) chocolate chips
½ cup (70 grams) marshmallow fluff
1 cup (44 grams) miniature marshmallows

Instructions

Prepare your 8 x 8 or 9 x 9 baking pan by lining it with parchment paper or using your favorite baking pan spray. These bars tend to be a bit sticky thanks to the marshmallows and fluff, so I line my pan with parchment to make removing them easier.

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit or 325 degrees Fahrenheit if using convection. Position an oven rack in the middle of the oven.

In a small pan on the stove or a small bowl in the microwave, melt the butter. As the butter melts, add the cream cheese, cocoa powder, sugars, and dry milk to a large mixing bowl.

When the butter is melted, carefully add the butter to the mixing bowl and stir to combine. The cream cheese may form small lumps, but those will be worked out as the dough is mixed. Add the eggs, vanilla, cinnamon, and salt to the mixing bowl and stir to combine.

In a bowl or a sifter, combine the flour, cornstarch, baking powder, and baking soda. Add to the mixing bowl and stir to combine. Take care not to overmix, stopping when no visible flour remains in the dough.

Add the chocolate chips to the bowl and mix until they are evenly distributed. Add the marshmallow fluff and marshmallows to the bowl and fold them into the dough. You're not looking to incorporate the marshmallow fluff into the dough, simply to swirl it through the dough and create a ribbon of marshmallow in the batter.

Using a spatula, transfer the batter to the prepared baking pan. Spread the batter to fill the pan in an even layer. The batter may look uneven and rough at this stage, but it will even out a bit while baking.

If you'd like to add a bit of extra marshmallow fluff to the top of the pan, you can add a few spoonfuls and then use a butter knife or chopstick to swirl it into the top of the dough.

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Bake the cookie bars in the preheated oven for 25 to 30 minutes or until just set on top. When fully baked, these cookie bars will begin to pull away from the sides of the pan and the top will have a somewhat dry appearance.

Appearance is the best indication of these bars being fully baked. A toothpick or skewer inserted into the middle of the pan should come out with small crumbs rather than batter attached when baked. Depending on the spot where you insert the toothpick, you may have gooey marshmallow or melted chocolate attached.

Because of their fudgy texture, chocolate chips, and marshmallow, these cookie bars may seem under baked. Resist the urge to bake them longer which will jeopardize their fudge like texture. As they cool to room temperature, they will set up nicely while remaining soft and fudgy.

Allow the cookie bars to cool to room temperature. Use the parchment paper to remove the cool bars from the baking pan, loosening any edges that are touching the pan. Cut into bars. The bars store amazingly well covered at room temperature for a week.



A Few Notes about this Recipe

CINNAMON

I add ground cinnamon to the homemade hot chocolate mix I keep on hand in the farmhouse kitchen all winter long. I like the warm flavor and comforting aroma it adds to the steaming cups of hot chocolate we drink after shoveling on a snowy winter's day. If you prefer, you can omit the cinnamon from this recipe with equally delicious results.

DRY MILK POWDER

I like to add dry milk powder to these bars. It really adds to that creamy flavor of a delicious cup of hot chocolate. If you don't have dry milk powder on hand, you can omit it from the recipe.

I don't recommend trying to substitute liquid milk. Even with adjustments to the dry ingredients, the texture and composition of the bars suffers. Liquid milk didn't seem to add any discernable flavor to the baked bars.

A TRICK FOR MEASURING MARSHMALLOW FLUFF

Marshmallow fluff is delicious, but it can be a sticky chore to measure. I like to weigh the fluff into my mixing bowl to avoid needing to use a measuring cup.

If you are using a measuring cup, spray it with a bit of cooking/baking spray before adding the marshmallow fluff. The light coating of oil makes the marshmallow much easier to get out of the measuring cup and won't affect the dough at all.

Thank you for being a member of our Cookie Recipe Club. We are so happy that you will be baking along with us this holiday season and all next year. We hope that you'll be making these cookies and sharing them with your friends and family for many years to come!



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