

Halloween candy for grown ups

A recipe for easy, rich and decadent pecan pralines

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

I've said before that a pecan is the only nut. Not everyone is a fan of this proclamation, so I'll clarify. A pecan is the only nut that is hardwired to elicit joy in my Southern brain.

"Pecan" is an Algonquin word that refers to pecans, walnuts and hickory nuts. They are a species of hickory trees and are native to the southern United States and northern Mexico along the Mississippi River. Pecans are in my two favorite fall desserts: pecan pie and pralines.

When Halloween approaches many people think of carving pumpkins, wearing costumes and watching horror movies that later require an Ambien. I think of candy.

I love a vaguely pumpkin-shaped Reese's in particular. But what I really want is a pecan praline.

Let's be real here. I'm not advocating that you whip up homemade candy for your costumed front door guests. Homemade candy for trick-or-treaters is universally frowned upon. You make homemade candy for yourself.

I'm a Halloween grinch. Several years ago, when my heart was three sizes bigger, I had trick-or-treaters ring my doorbell. When I answered the door, they just stood there. It was a silent stand-off.

They obviously didn't understand the trick-or-treating ritual. Finally, I said, "we both have roles here and you're not doing yours." They blinked first and half heartily said "trick or treat." I gave them candy, turned off the porch light and ate the rest of the candy on my couch.

If you're going to eat candy on your couch in the dark, make it a pecan praline. They're a New Orleans tradition composed of sugar, cream, butter and pecans. I add bourbon. They resemble a round maple sugar candy encasing whole or chopped pecans.

These pralines make Grinch-dom nearly impossible. I smile as I eat them in a darkened house every Halloween.

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Brian Medford's pecan pralines include a splash of bourbon and molasses.

Pecan Pralines Recipe

Yields about one dozen. A candy thermometer will help immensely with this recipe.

- 5 ounces pecans (halves or chopped)
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon molasses
- 1 tablespoon bourbon (optional)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Spread the pecan on a baking sheet and toast lightly. Set aside and let cool.

Line a baking sheet with waxed paper, or have 12 paper baking cups ready.

In a large saucepan, combine the sugar, cream, butter, salt and molasses.

Place over medium high heat, stirring to break up any lumps. Bring to a boil and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture comes to 240 degrees (about six to eight minutes). Remove from the heat and let cool slightly.

Stir the mixture vigorously until it turns creamy and opaque. Add the cooled pecans and the bourbon to the sugar mixture and stir. The mixture will begin to thicken. Working quickly, spoon out 1/4 cup portions onto the prepared baking sheet or into paper baking cups.

Let the pralines cool completely, about one hour. Serve immediately or wrap pralines in wax paper or plastic wrap, and store in an airtight container for up to a week.