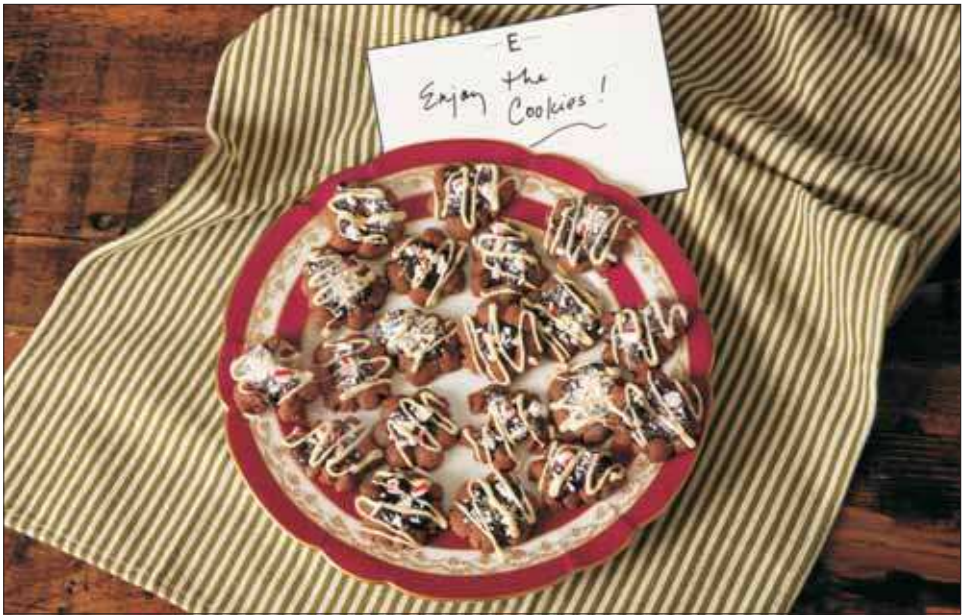




SWEET TREAT. Peppermint Bark Spritz Cookies, a recipe by Elizabeth Karmel, are seen at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

A new way and improved way to eat peppermint bark

By Elizabeth Karmel
The Associated Press

I have always loved peppermint and chocolate together and peppermint bark is my favorite way to eat it. Or it was — until I created this peppermint bark variation of my favorite childhood Christmas cookie. My mother made Spritz cookies every Christmas for as long as I can remember. She always made the simple butter cookies in both chocolate and vanilla and we decorated them with colored sugar sprinkles. My favorite shape was the poinsettia, because you could eat the cookie, one petal at a time. The hardest thing about making this recipe is using the cookie press. There is no way around it — you need a cookie press. My mother used her mother’s cookie press until it stopped working and since then, we have both purchased many cookie presses trying to find one that was smooth and easy to work. A cookie press looks like the culinary

version of a caulking gun and deposits only enough dough to make one cookie. I tried quite a few presses, and the best one that I have found so far is the OXO cookie press. I also love that it comes with all the traditional patterns like the Christmas tree, wreath, and several flowers, but also has an elegant fleur de lis and a heart. You can also buy extra seasonal discs and make spritz cookies year round. The extra Christmas discs also have a great bow design that would be perfect for baby and bridal shower parties. Once you have a good press, all you need to make the cookie dough is a bowl and a blending fork, or your hands. I’ve taken the basic chocolate spritz cookie recipe and instead of decorating with sugar, I decorate with melted chocolate, sprinkling with crushed peppermint candies and drizzling with white chocolate to create my Peppermint Bark Spritz Cookie. Editor’s note: Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pit master at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and the author of three books, including Taming the Flame.

Peppermint Bark Spritz Cookies

Note: Cookie presses like the OXO Good Grips with stainless-steel discs work better than presses with plastic plates.
Start to finish: 30 minutes, not including cooling and decorating
Servings: 30 (Makes about 5 dozen cookies)

- 1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature
- 2 squares (2 ounces) unsweetened chocolate, melted
- 2/3 cup granulated white sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 1/2 cups sifted all-purpose flour

Topping:

- 4 ounces semi-sweet chocolate, melted
- 2 ounces white chocolate, melted
- 1 cup crushed peppermint candies

Preheat oven to 400° Fahrenheit.
Mix butter, unsweetened chocolate, and sugar together until creamy. Add egg yolks one at a time to combine. Add vanilla and mix thoroughly.
Using your hands or a blending fork, work in the flour, a little at a time, until smooth.
Divide dough into two to three pieces and roll them into a tube shape and cover with wax paper. Chill dough for 30 minutes. When the dough is chilled, place the roll in the cookie press tube and choose a cookie plate for your design. Press the cookies out one at a time onto an ungreased cookie sheet.
Bake seven to 10 minutes or until set but not brown. Remove from cookie sheet after one minute, and gently place on a cooling rack. Let cookies cool completely.
Melt chocolate and place in a decorating bag or a re-closeable plastic bag. When ready to decorate cookies, snip a small corner at one end of the bag for the chocolate to flow through. When the cookies are cool, carefully drizzle melted semi-sweet chocolate on the top of the cookie. While the chocolate is still warm, sprinkle with crushed peppermint candies so the candy will stick to the chocolate, then drizzle with melted white chocolate.
Place in the refrigerator to set the chocolate for at least one hour before serving.
Store in an airtight container in a cool place.
Nutrition information per serving: 146 calories (73 calories from fat); 8 g fat (5 g saturated, 0 g trans fats); 35 mg cholesterol; 3 mg sodium; 17 g carbohydrate; 1 g fiber; 7 g sugar; 2 g protein.

Cheese fondue that's healthy thanks to a sneaky ingredient

By Melissa d’Arabian
The Associated Press

Cheese fondue is the ultimate winter comfort food. Living in France in my early 30s, I fell in love with the classic recipe made with crisp white wine and nutty gruyère cheese. One of my favorite spots in Paris was a restaurant whose name translated literally into “Bread, Wine, and Cheese” that was hidden away in a cozy underground cave with low ceilings. Stepping inside from invariably chilly rainy Paris nights, we’d be hit with an appealingly musty aroma, like a freshly-popped wine cork combined with heady, fatty, aged cheeses. French fondue is life changing. And I’ve found a way to capture all that flavor for a fraction of the calories. Just kidding. Truth is, I can’t completely mimic my beloved wine-cave version of melted bliss. But, I can get close enough to scratch the cheese-fondue itch in a dip while staying reasonably healthy, thanks to a sneaky ingredient: white beans. Cooked white beans add lush body to the dip, so I can swap out a bunch of the



HEALTHY TWIST. A bowl of Cheese Fondue Dip is seen in Coronado, California. Adding cooked white beans to the fondue makes it a slightly healthier dish. (Melissa d’Arabian via AP)
cheese and heavy cream, bringing the calories and fat way down. Low-fat cream cheese, or Neufchâtel, boosts the cheesy factor, so a mere half cup of high-quality grated gruyère goes a long way to keeping the dip squarely in the cheese-fondue flavor profile, helped by dry mustard and a dash of ground nutmeg. The beans are also a wise way to boost the nutrient profile — one cup of white beans adds 19 grams of protein and 13 grams of fiber. If you are entertaining on a budget, including frugal-friendly beans in your menu to stretch more expensive ingredients (like gruyère) is a smart move — guests will be satisfied with the extra fiber and protein. Since this is a dip, it pairs beautifully with veggies to create a stellar winter crudité — steam up cubes of butternut squash if you really want to winterize. The beans offer a final benefit, and I’ve saved the best for last. Blended beans stabilize the cheesy dip, so you can serve it warm, room temperature, or chilled — a relief if you are entertaining this holiday and don’t want to worry about cheese congealing. This dip will stay perfectly creamy all party long. Food Network star Melissa d’Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget and the author of Supermarket Healthy.

Cheese Fondue Dip

Start to finish: 15 minutes
Servings: Approximately 8

- 1/2 cup sliced shallot (about 2 large shallots)
- 1/4 teaspoon dried rubbed sage
- 2 teaspoons unsalted butter
- 2 teaspoons flour
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1/2 cup chicken or vegetable broth, divided
- 4 ounces Neufchâtel cheese (“light cream cheese”)
- 1/2 cup shredded gruyère cheese
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon dried mustard
- pinch ground nutmeg
- pinch ground black pepper
- 1 cup cooked white beans, drained and rinsed if canned

Cook the shallot and sage in the butter in a medium skillet over medium-high heat, until shallots are soft (but not brown), about five minutes. Sprinkle flour over the shallots and cook for one minute, stirring.
Deglaze the pan with the wine, and let bubble for a minute to let the alcohol evaporate. Add 1/4 cup of the broth and stir. Add the Neufchâtel cheese and stir as it melts and creates a thick, creamy mixture, about one to two minutes. Stir in the gruyère cheese and turn off the heat — it will melt with the residual heat. Let mixture cool a few minutes.
Meanwhile, place the remaining 1/4 cup broth, lemon juice, dried mustard, nutmeg, pepper, and beans in a blender. Blend on high until smooth, about 30 seconds. (If the bean mixture is too thick to blend, add a tablespoon of water.) Scrape the cream cheese mixture into the blender and blend all together until very creamy, about 30 seconds.
Serve warm, room temperature, or cold.
Nutrition information per serving: 118 calories (48 calories from fat); 5 g fat (3 g saturated, 0 g trans fats); 17 mg cholesterol; 122 mg sodium; 9 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 2 g sugar; 6 g protein.

The staff at
The Asian Reporter
wish you and your family
a safe and happy holiday!