

Milk HAZELNUT REVEL BARS chocolate

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I love a cookie as much as the next person. Yes, I'm partial to the thick and chewy variety and my forever favorite will always be chocolate chip, but really, I am fond of them all. But cookie-making can be kind of laborious – there's the resting of the dough (a rest contributes to a chewier cookie, if you, like me, are into that sort of thing), the even scooping of the 12 balls of dough for each properly greased cookie sheet (making sure each scoop is of equal size contributes to uniform-looking cookies), and then the baking of the dough which, for "perfectly baked cookies," requires you to bake only one baking sheet at a time, rotating at the halfway point, and then resting the cookies (again) on the sheet before removing them to a cooling rack.

Cookie vs. bar

But lest I have turned you off of cookie-making forever, I present you with the cookie's cute, yet tough, little brother: the bar cookie. I am a sucker for a bar cookie for all of the reasons that I have issues with regular cookies, and then some: I love the bar cookie's ease of assembly (press the dough into a pan and *voilà* – you're done), the crowd-pleasing number of servings a single tray produces (no need to dirty several cookie sheets), as all 24 (or more, if you cut them small enough) bars are baked simultaneously, and the portability (cookies are portable, too, of course, but cookies can break in transit, but scrappy little bar cookies? not a chance...).

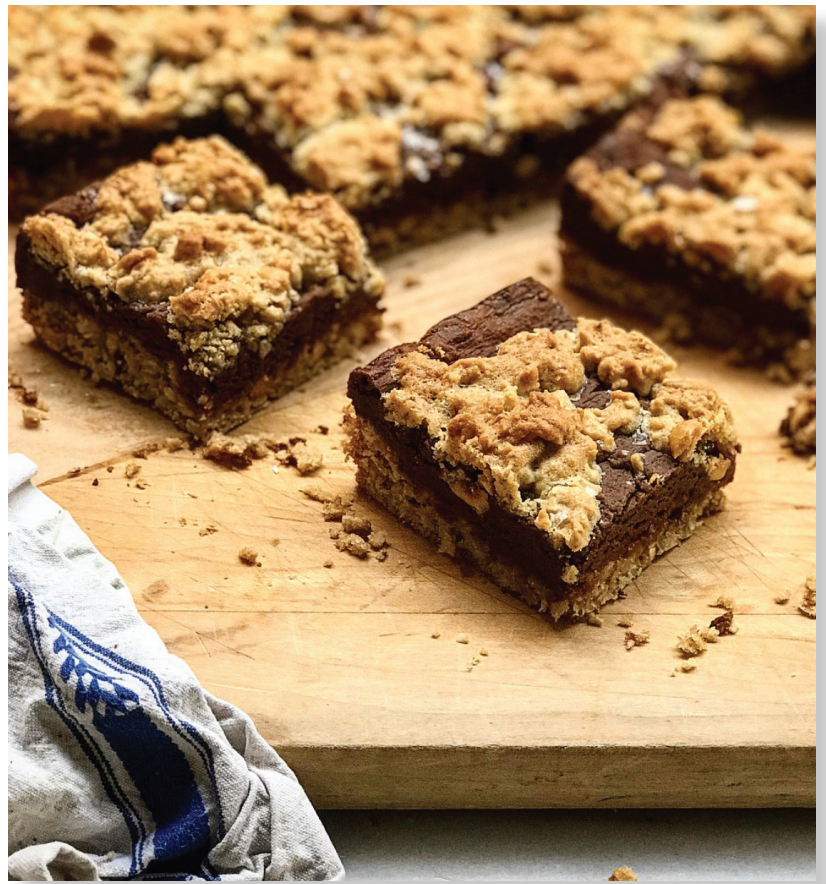
I particularly love a layered bar cookie, and if one of the layers just happens to include a combo of milk chocolate and hazelnut, well then I'm basically in bar-cookie heaven.

A revel bar

A revel bar, for the uninitiated (a group that included me until quite recently) is a bar cookie made with oats, nuts, chocolate, and sweetened condensed milk. The chewy oat and nut-filled cookie bit forms the base of the bar, as well as the topping, and the chocolate and sweetened condensed milk make for a delicious, fudgy middle layer. In fact, "fudge" is the operative word here, as here's a quick fun fact for you: an easy, old-fashioned, stovetop fudge, that does not require a pesky candy thermometer, is made just this way: by combining melted chocolate and sweetened condensed milk. A recipe for one is included in my latest cookbook, *The Vintage Baker*, and is not dissimilar from the middle layer of a revel bar ... but I digress.

Here, I have substituted toasted hazelnuts for the almonds or walnuts usually called for in a revel bar, and a chocolate hazelnut spread, such as Nutella, for the straight up chocolate and sweetened condensed milk layer typically found in the bar. However, if you'd rather just use melted milk chocolate, you can substitute that for the Nutella. A final sprinkle of flaky sea salt before baking, helps balance all the flavors and keeps the sweetness in check.

Bar cookies are an excellent addition to Christmas cookie swaps and holiday gift giving in general. Although the middle layer of these revel bars might melt a bit if mailed to a friend in Christmas-cookie-need, a quick spell in the refrigerator will firm things up nicely. And to say that Santa would be beyond thrilled to receive a plate of these on Christmas Eve, after a hard, cold night of delivering presents, is an understatement.



Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups instant oats
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup hazelnuts, toasted and chopped
1 1/4 tsp table salt
1 tsp baking soda
2 sticks unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
1 cup light brown sugar
1/2 cup granulated sugar
2 eggs
1 tbsp pure vanilla extract
2 cups chocolate hazelnut spread, such as Nutella, or two cups milk chocolate chips, melted
1 1/4 cup (one 14 oz. can) sweetened condensed milk
Flaky sea salt, such as Maldon, for sprinkling

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 13x9x2-inch baking pan with softened butter or cooking spray. Line the bottom and two short sides with parchment. Set aside.

Combine the oats, flour, nuts, salt, and soda in a medium bowl and whisk together. Set aside.

Add the melted butter and sugars to a large bowl and whisk to combine. Add the eggs, one at a time, and the vanilla, whisking after adding each. Add the dry ingredients to the wet and fold to combine with a rubber

spatula. Reserve 1 3/4 cups of the dough for the topping and transfer the remainder of the dough to the prepared pan. Place a piece of plastic wrap over the dough and press it flat with your hands until it evenly covers the bottom of the pan.

In a small bowl, add the Nutella and sweetened condensed milk, and stir with a fork to combine. Place in the microwave on high and melt in 20 second bursts, stirring after each, until combined, about two minutes. The mixture may not be perfectly smooth, and that is fine. Spread the mixture over the dough in the pan and top with the remaining dough, by crumbling it into bits and scattering it over the fudgy layer. Sprinkle with the flaky sea salt.

Bake for 25 minutes until the oat topping is browned. Let the bars set up, at least 4 hours on the counter or place the slightly cooled bars in the fridge for about two hour. To serve, run a paring knife around the edge of the pan and use the parchment paper to lift out the bars. Slice into 24 bars using a chef's knife. Bars will keep tightly wrapped in plastic wrap on the counter for up to three days. •

Jessie is a baker and cookbook author; you can learn more about her through her website jessiesheebanbakes.com.