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**GOING GLUTEN-FREE** | Joleen Oshiro

# Relieve holiday sugar overload, baking stress with fudgy treat

If you're anything like me, by the time you hit this first day of the new year you're feeling rather wrung out. Whether you've been cooking, baking, shopping, wrapping, partying — or all of the above — the holidays take their toll. So there'll be no more dessert-baking anytime soon.

**KEY INGREDIENT:**  
 To reduce the processed sugar in these treats, try stevia-sweetened chocolate baking chips. They sell for \$9 per 9-ounce bag at Down to Earth.

But even when the pile of (gluten-free) cookies and cakes is finally consumed, and your sweet tooth protests the sudden void in sugary treats, you probably still won't be eager to face cookie sheets and cake pans.

Boy, have I got the recipe for you. It promises to satisfy any harranguing sugar cravings even as it eliminates refined sugar. And there's no oven involved, just a little bit of micro-

waving and an hour of refrigeration.

This wondrous treat? Peanut Butter-Chocolate Fudge, and it's delicious.

The recipe comes courtesy of my generous friend, chef Kate Wagner, a gluten-free baking wizard. She created this dessert for an upcoming cookbook but still shared it with me. Like I said — generous.

The recipe also accommodates folks who need to watch their sugar, calling for unsweetened chocolate and coconut palm sugar, an unrefined sugar.

Because Wagner is so careful about her ingredients, I decided to go healthy all the way and got some fresh peanut butter at Down to Earth Organic and Natural. There, customers can grind a variety of nut butters for purchase.

Bonus: I also found Lily's brand chocolate baking chips sweetened with stevia, a plant-based sweetener, that are virtually sugar-free. (I enjoy Lily's wide variety of chocolate candy bars, too.) This allowed me to reduce the coconut sugar from half a cup to an eighth. I prefer my desserts less sweet, so if you use a product like Lily's chocolate, reduce the sugar according to your taste.

Kate's recipe also calls for a bit of butter and cream cheese, and I substituted both seamlessly with vegan versions.

And as it turned out, I was a little short on the peanut butter, so I couldn't top my fudge



PHOTOS BY BRUCE ASATO / BASATO@STARADVERTISER.COM

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**Chocolate Peanut-Butter Fudge**

Courtesy chef Kate Wagner

- 2 teaspoons margarine or butter, melted
- 8 ounces unsweetened chocolate
- 1-1/2 cups peanut or almond butter, room temperature (substitute nut butter of your choice), divided
- 4 ounces 1/3-less-fat cream cheese
- 1/2 cup coconut sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup roasted, chopped nuts of your choice, divided

Coat 8-by-8-inch baking pan with butter or margarine. Place chocolate in microwave-safe bowl, and microwave in 30-second intervals until melted, for no more than 2 minutes total. (Note that when chocolate melts it can retain its shape until stirred.)

In another microwave-safe bowl, combine 1 cup of nut butter, cream cheese, coconut sugar, vanilla and salt. Microwave 1 minute to soften, then stir.

Stir into melted chocolate. If chocolate becomes stiff, microwave 30 to 45 seconds to soften. Add 1/2 cup nuts and mix, then spread in prepared pan and set aside to cool.

When cool, spread remaining nut butter on top of fudge, then sprinkle with remaining nuts. Refrigerate 1 hour.

When solidified, cut into 2-inch portions. Makes 16 pieces.

Nutritional information unavailable.

**VARIATIONS:** Swirl together chocolate and nut butter mixture instead of incorporating, to make a marbled fudge; or swirl in your favorite jelly. Make it your own!

with a layer of peanut butter as Kate does. But it didn't matter. Kate said she designed the recipe to be adaptable, and it is that.

The result was a hearty dessert with a yummy, full-bodied peanut butter flavor. But I can't really call my version "fudge." While the fresh peanut butter delivered great taste, it also introduced a grainy texture that made the end product crumbly, not creamy, like a cakey brownie.

I sampled the treat around the office to expert bakers, and all agreed that a creamy, commercially processed peanut butter is called for here. With more oil and a silky smooth texture, it would deliver a truly fudgy treat.

*"Going Gluten-Free" helps meet the cooking and dining challenges faced by those on wheat-free diets. It runs on the first Wednesday of each month. Send questions and suggestions to Joleen Oshiro, joshiro@staradvertiser.com.*

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