

Homemade candy—terrific way to sweeten the season

Candy is a perennial holiday favorite, and the homemade variety is best of all. If you've never played confectioner before you'll want an informative book to turn to, which supplies not only the tantalizing recipes (that's only half of it!), but which also gives copious background information on candy-making techniques.

One such book is *Candy Recipes and Other Confections* (Dover Publications, Inc.) by May B. Van Arsdale and Ruth Parrish Casa Emellos.

The book outlines cooking temperatures for various confection types, as well as giving an overview of different candy categories, the necessary equipment and basic ingredients.

Recipe chapters tempt the potential confectioner with Fondant; Fudge, Penuchi and Operas; Divinity and Nougat; Maple Candies; and Popcorn Candies, to name a few.

Reprinted below, from *Candy Recipes and Other Confections* are recipes for two sweet treats, Molasses Pop Corn Balls and Caramel Walnut Squares, both perfect offerings for Christmas get-togethers.

MOLASSES POP CORN BALLS

LARGE RECIPE

- 1 cup light molasses
- 1 cup dark corn syrup
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3 quarts popped corn
- ½ teaspoon salt

SMALL RECIPE

- ½ cup light molasses
- ½ cup dark corn syrup
- ½ tablespoon vinegar
- 1½ tablespoons butter
- 1½ quarts popped corn
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Mix molasses, syrup, and vinegar in a saucepan and cook, stirring occasionally to prevent burning, until the temperature 270°F. is reached. After 240°F. is reached, constant stirring will be necessary. When done add butter and stir only enough to mix. Slowly pour the cooked syrup over the salted popped corn and mix well.

Form into balls with the hands, using as little pressure as possible.

Two drops of oil of lemon may be added to the syrup.

Cold water test when syrup reaches 270°F.: slightly brittle.

Yield (large recipe): number of balls — twenty (two and one-half inches in diameter).

CARAMEL WALNUT SQUARES

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons dark caramel syrup
- 2 tablespoons condensed milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 pound confectioners' sugar
- ¾ cup chopped walnuts

Melt the butter, add the caramel syrup, condensed milk and vanilla. Mix and keep

salt and sugar. Knead in the chopped nuts. Press into a lightly buttered pan, cool, remove from pan and cut into squares.

Yield: weight about 1¼ pounds.

CARAMEL SYRUP

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup or more boiling water

In a frying pan or a heavy aluminum saucepan heat the sugar over a very low flame, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until it is melted to a syrup. Remove from the flame and add the water slowly while stirring. Return to flame and allow it to simmer until it is a thin syrup. If there are any lumps add a little more water and boil it until the lumps dissolve.

Caramel syrup may be used for waffles or griddle cakes either as it is or mixed with an equal amount of corn syrup. One-fourth teaspoon of vanilla may be added if desired. If it is to be used for this purpose the water must be added to the melted sugar when it is a very light golden brown. It is also used as a flavoring in candies, frostings, custards, ice cream and other desserts. If it is to be used as a flavoring material the sugar must be heated until it is a deep golden brown before adding the water in order to develop a strong caramel flavor.

When the boiling is finished the product must be a thin syrup. If not to be used immediately, keep it in a covered jar.

Yield: About ½ cup.

Figurine it out: helpful tips for picking a Christmas collectible

The first annual Christmas plate, produced in 1895, started a tradition that now includes not only annual plates, but collectible bells, ornaments and figurines.

The prices vary from a few dollars to a few hundred dollars, and the quality can vary just as much.

Marshall Stoltz, Curator of The Norman Rockwell Museum, suggests these tips for choosing a high-quality collectible that will be treasured for many Christmases to come — and won't cost a bundle.

- Look for a limited edition. Some annual collectibles are available in quantities of only about 10,000 worldwide, or they may be limited to sale during one Christmas season only. Either way, the limited number helps assure a unique and precious gift.

- Check the detail work. "You should be able to see actual details on a figurine's hands and face," explains Stoltz. "And if Santa is checking his list, you most definitely should see his writing!"

- High artistic merit can be judged by a clear, faithful reproduction of a Rockwell or other famous artist's work. With figurines, look for individually hand painted and hand crafted items. "A mass-produced plate or figurine just won't have the same clarity and detail," Stoltz says.

- Porcelain is the best quality material for plates and other collectibles in most experts' eyes. The hard white ceramicware produces translucent skin tones and vibrant, true colors.

- Look for well-known, reliable manufacturers; their

reputation is important to them, so they use better materials and workmanship to produce a collectible that will satisfy their customers.

Be sure to compare the qual-

ity of a manufacturer's product year after year. New collectibles should feature the same fine craftsmanship and attention to detail as the first figurine or plate

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RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

Gift books for kids:

Books have long been favored holiday gifts for kids. But it's easy to be stymied by the stacks of children's books on display in stores:

Entitled *Read To Me! Teach Me!* (American Baby Books, 1982), it includes selection tips and lists of books recommended for children from birth through five years of age.

- Birth to one: Best are simple picture books with boldly-defined illustrations. Picture-songbooks are ideal, too, and colorful Mother Goose books merit a special endorsement from Ms. Rossi.

- One to two: Since one-year-olds love to be sung to, songbooks will be met with enthusiasm, especially those that include fingerplays.

Also appropriate are simple "concept" books — that is, those which provide exercises for learning the alphabet, counting, colors and shapes.

- Two to three: Children in this age group can usually identify simple pictures in books and relate pictures to the spoken word. So look for wordless picturebooks, short storybooks with simple plots; participation or response books and more concept books.

- Three to four: Since three-year-olds are developing increased attention spans and curiosity about the world around them, picture books about "real" people at work, animals and vehicles are ideal for their needs.

- Four to five: To stimulate the developing sense of humor which characterizes this age group, introduce humorous books, picturebooks with varied artistic styles and sophisticated concept books.

- Five to six: For this exciting developmental period when children enter school, beginning readers, poetry and picture stories are in order. Look for those featuring strong characters and plots, and more elaborate fantasy.

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