

PUMPKIN CHEESECAKE BARS

This takes the gingersnap crust from another pumpkin pie recipe and a couple different pumpkin cheesecake recipes to make a treat in the shape of a bar. Although I love pie, I am often frustrated that the crust distribution is so unequal across the slice. And while I love this gingersnap crust, it is a bit crumbly at its exposed edges in a pie. The bar solves these two problems. Plus, this swirled filling is nowhere near as rich as many cheesecake recipes, nor is it as cloyingly custardy as many pumpkin pie recipes. The texture is smooth, creamy and spicy. The overall ginger flavor is quite strong, so you might want to cut down the amount if that worries you. Finally, there are lots of steps and planning ahead, including two rounds with your food processor, but the final product is worth the time and effort, and none of the steps are terribly arduous. A perfect way to spend a fall day when you can be in and out of the kitchen.

Crust:

9 oz. gingersnap cookies
1 cup pecan pieces
¼ cup brown sugar
2 tablespoons chopped crystallized ginger (optional)
¼ cup butter, melted

Filling:

1 6 - 7" sugar pumpkin *OR* 1 15 oz. can pumpkin puree
¾ cup sugar
¼ cup chopped crystallized ginger
8 oz. cream cheese, room temperature
2 large eggs, room temperature
¼ cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon flour
¼ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon nutmeg
1/8 teaspoon allspice

If making your own puree:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil.

Cut the pumpkin in half vertically (through or right next to stem, or remove stem). Scoop out seeds and stringy stuff. Place pumpkin halves cut side down. Cover with more foil, not tightly, more like a tent.

Bake until tender – until you can pierce the skin and flesh all the way through easily with a fork – about 1 ½ hours. Remove from oven and cool until you can handle it. Scoop out the flesh into a medium bowl. Puree using an immersion blender. Pour off any excess liquid.

While the pumpkin is baking, make the crust:

Put cookies into food processor, then process into crumbs. Add pecans, brown sugar and ginger and process until nuts are finely ground. Add melted butter and process to blend. Dump into a Buttered 13 x 9” glass dish and press with spatula to cover bottom evenly. Bake at 350 until set and browned, 10 – 15 minutes, then cool completely.

Make the filling:

Pulse sugar and ginger in (cleaned) food processor until ginger is well chopped. Add cream cheese and process until smooth. Add eggs, cream, flour and salt and process until combined.

Whisk 1 1/3 cups of the cream cheese mixture (reserving the rest) with the pumpkin puree, cinnamon, nutmeg and allspice. Once the crust is cooled, pour the pumpkin filling over it and spread evenly. Pour the reserved cream cheese mixture on top and then swirl with a spatula. Bake at 350 degrees until center is just set, 35 – 45 minutes. Cool on a rack to room temperature (at least an hour), cover loosely with foil and chill for at least 4 hours. Then reward yourself for the delayed gratification with a nice large piece.