

COOK'S ILLUSTRATED

ALMOND GRANOLA WITH DRIED FRUIT

Makes about 9 cups. Published March 1, 2012. From Cook's Illustrated.

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Store-bought granola suffers from many shortcomings. It's often loose and gravelly and/or infuriatingly expensive. We wanted to make our own granola at home, with big, satisfying clusters and crisp texture. The secret was to firmly pack the granola mixture into a rimmed baking sheet before baking. Once it was baked, we had a granola "bark" that we could break into crunchy clumps of any size.

Chopping the almonds by hand is the first choice for superior texture and crunch. If you prefer not to hand chop, substitute an equal quantity of slivered or sliced almonds. (A food processor does a lousy job of chopping whole nuts evenly.) Use a single type of your favorite dried fruit or a combination. Do not use quick oats.

INGREDIENTS

- 1/3 cup maple syrup
- 1/3 cup packed (2 1/3 ounces) light brown sugar
- 4 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 5 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 2 cups (10 ounces) raw almonds, chopped coarse
- 2 cups raisins or other dried fruit, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Whisk maple syrup, brown sugar, vanilla, and salt in large bowl. Whisk in oil. Fold in oats and almonds until thoroughly coated.
3. Transfer oat mixture to prepared baking sheet and spread across sheet into thin, even layer (about 3/8 inch thick). Using stiff metal spatula, compress oat mixture until very compact. Bake until lightly browned, 40 to 45 minutes, rotating pan once halfway through baking. Remove granola from oven and cool on wire rack to room temperature, about 1 hour. Break cooled granola into pieces of desired size. Stir in dried fruit. (Granola can be stored in airtight container for up to 2 weeks.)

RECIPE TESTING

Granola Gone Wrong

Most store-bought granola is so bad (and so overpriced), we're surprised anyone ever buys it.

STEP-BY-STEP

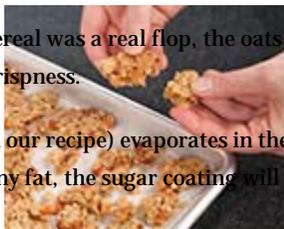
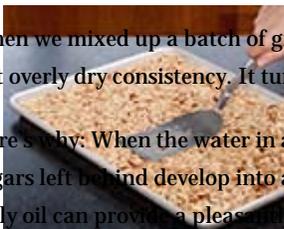
Keys to Chunkier Granola

RECIPE TESTING

For Better Granola, Add Fat

When we mixed up a batch of granola in which we left out the oil, the resulting cereal was a real flop, the oats having taken on a crisp but overly dry consistency. It turns out that fat is essential for creating a likable crispness.

Here's why: When the water in a viscous liquid sweetener (like the maple syrup in our recipe) evaporates in the heat of the oven, the sugars left behind develop into a thin coating on the oats and nuts, but without any fat, the sugar coating will become brittle and dry. Only oil can provide a pleasantly crisp coating with a sense of moistness.



PREP DOWN provide moisture, fat-free versions spread oat mixture onto parchment-lined baking

BAKE BUT DON'T STIR Bake granola at 325 degrees for 40 to 45 minutes. Rotate

BREAK UP Break cooled granola "bark" into pieces as large as you'd



pan halfway through baking but don't stir. like. America's Test Kitchen is a 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside of Boston. It is the home of Cook's Country and Cook's Illustrated magazines and is the workday destination for more than three dozen test cooks, editors, and recipe developers. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand how and why they work and arrive at the best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of brands that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to America's Test Kitchen (www.americastestkitchen.com) on public television.

contain dry, dusty
compact
oats, versus chunks, too
readily absorb the milk or
yogurt and turn soggy.