

Fresh From the Kitchen

Recipes excerpted from ***A Baker's Field Guide to Holiday Candy & Confections*** by Dede Wilson. Published by Harvard Common Press, Boston, MA. Copyright 2005. Reprinted with permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

Sugarplums

Type: Hand-formed candy.

Description: These small candies are made from a mélange of dried fruit and nuts. They are great to make with kids, using orange juice instead of alcohol. There are several ways to finish them off, and I suggest that you choose at least two of the options. You may roll them in granulated or confectioners' sugar, but since these candies are actually sugar-free, despite their name, I suggest trying the other toppings. My favorites are ground pistachios for their lovely green color, and additional coconut for a snowball effect. This is a recipe from *A Baker's Field Guide to Christmas Cookies* (The Harvard Common Press, 2003), but this time I have streamlined the preparation. It really does work to grind all the ingredients together at once!

Field Notes: The original version may have come from Portugal, where fresh black figs and cooked green plums were used to make a similar candy.

Lifespan: Store 1 month at room temperature in an airtight container.

Yield: 65 sugarplums

Ingredients:

1 cup toasted pecan halves
1/2 cup pitted dates
1/2 cup dried Calimyrna figs
1/2 cup pitted dried plums (prunes)
1/2 cup dried cherries
1/2 cup golden raisins
1/2 cup unsweetened grated coconut
1/4 cup rum, orange liqueur, or orange juice

Toppings (optional):

Finely chopped almonds, hazelnuts, pecans, pistachios, or walnuts
Finely grated bittersweet chocolate
Unsweetened Dutch-processed cocoa powder
Unsweetened grated coconut
Granulated sugar
Confectioners' sugar

65 small fluted paper cups (optional)

Sugarplums, (continued)

Directions:

1. The key to this recipe is to end up with all the nuts and fruits the same small size. You may chop them by hand or use a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Place all nuts and fruits in the bowl of a food processor and pulse on and off until the desired size is reached; the mixture should be evenly and finely ground.
2. Place fruit and nut mixture, coconut, and liquid of choice in a medium-size bowl. Mix together by hand until thoroughly combined; the mixture should hold together when compressed. If it is dry, add a little more liquid.
3. Roll mixture into 1-inch balls, compressing the mixture so it sticks together. Place toppings of choice in small bowls and roll sugarplums in them, one by one, to coat completely, I like to leave some in their natural state as well. Place in small fluted paper cups, if desired.

Candy Tidbits: To measure small amounts of ingredients such as prunes, simply press them firmly into a 1/2-cup measuring cup.