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Hazelnut Brittle

Makes 20 pieces – Overall Prep Time: 1-1/4 hours – Active Prep Time: 15 minutes – Easy – Moderately Expensive – Do Not Freeze – Ships Well – Do Not Double – Shelf Life: 1 week in an airtight container at room temperature

[NOTE: Microwave ovens vary. We recommend checking the brittle making often and stirring frequently to avoid burning and overheating. We found that the brittle did not require the length of time noted below, and that 30 second intervals for stirring helped in the later stages].

Write a thank you note, invitation, or simple hello on this small, embellished box, fold it up, and put a very sophisticated sweet like this golden brittle of hazelnuts inside. This is an irresistible little gift. Do use caution as you make the brittle: Boiling sugar isn't just hot, it is positively molten. Use heavy oven mitts once you begin to heat the sugar and nuts.

1/4 cup (1/2 stick) unsalted butter
1 cup chopped hazelnuts (you can substitute pecans or almonds)
1 cup superfine sugar
1/2 cup light corn syrup
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
1 teaspoon cognac
1 teaspoon baking soda

1. Using 3 tablespoons of the butter, heavily coat the bottom of a standard sheet pan (11 x 17 inches) and set it aside.
2. Combine the nuts, sugar, corn syrup, and salt in a microwave-safe bowl. Microwave the mixture on High for 3 minutes, pause the oven to stir the mixture well, and microwave on High for 3 minutes more. Pause the oven again, stir the mixture once more, and microwave on High for another minute.
3. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon butter to the brittle mixture without stirring and microwave on High for 2-1/2 minutes more. Remove the bowl from the microwave and gently stir in the cognac and baking soda, taking care because the boiling mixture may foam and sputter when you add these ingredients. Quickly pour the hot brittle onto the buttered sheet pan. Working very quickly, pick up the sheet pan with oven mitts and tilt the pan back and forth and side-to-side to spread the molten brittle into as thin a layer as possible over the sheet pan before it cools and hardens.
4. Cool the pan on a rack for at least 1 hour. Break the brittle by hand into generous bite-sized pieces. Store in an airtight container until the pillow box wrapping is completed and you are ready to assemble the gift.