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Hillcrest Ace Hardware
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Handmade English Toffee

Makes about 75 small irregular pieces

Are you among the many that love toffee? Some cite the buttery flavor as the reason; others like the rich caramel flavor, and still others mention the crunchy texture. Whatever the reason, toffee is a big favorite! With just a few ingredients and some kitchen alchemy, delicious toffee is made. The process is easy and foolproof when a candy thermometer is used. The other secret to great toffee is proper toasting of the nuts. We walk you through the steps to success:

Ingredients:

1-1/2 cups almonds, finely chopped (or pecans or walnuts if you prefer)
2 cups butter, unsalted (4 sticks)
2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup warm water
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1 cup semi-sweet (or bittersweet) chocolate chips
Sea salt for sprinkling on top (optional)

Directions:

1. Prepare a sheet pan 15" x 10" by lightly buttering, or lining with a piece of parchment paper also lightly greased. (This pan size will make 1/4-inch thick toffee pieces. Use a larger pan for thinner toffee, or a smaller pan for thicker toffee.)
2. Toast the almonds lightly in a low oven, 350°F, by spreading on a sheet pan and roasting for 5-7 minutes or until fragrant and just beginning to turn a golden color. Watch carefully during toasting. Transfer the toasted almonds to another pan to cool and halt the toasting. Set aside.
3. In a large 4 qt. saucepan or 5.5 qt. Dutch oven, combine the butter, sugar, salt, water, and vanilla. Over medium heat, warm the ingredients, stirring continuously until the butter is melted and the sugar dissolved.
4. Over medium-low heat, allow the mixture to cook to 300°F, hard-crack stage. Stir occasionally during the process. This will take 20-35 minutes. (If you do not have a candy thermometer, test for the hard crack sugar stage by placing a small amount of the butter-sugar syrup in cold water. If it quickly forms hard, breakable strands, it's at hard crack stage. If the mixture remains soft and pliable, it is at soft ball, or soft crack stage and has not reached the required temperature.)
5. Stir in 3/4 cup of the toasted almonds (reserving the remaining 3/4 cup for the top). Immediately, pour the mixture into the prepared sheet pan, spreading evenly. Allow to cool slightly, about 5 minutes.

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6. Sprinkle the chocolate chips on top of the toffee. After about another 5 minutes, spread the now warm chips over the top with an offset spatula or the back of a spoon. Immediately sprinkle the remaining toasted almonds on top of the melted chocolate and press in lightly.

7. Allow the cooling to continue for another 2 hours, then break the sheet of toffee into bite-sized pieces. Store in a cool, dry, airtight container, or package in gift bags and share with others!