

Mint

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Origins, History, and Fun Facts

- Mint is a catchall term that refers to the genus *Mentha*, which contains between 10 and 20 species. The genus is widespread, present on all continents except Antarctica and South America. When used in a culinary/agricultural context, mint usually refers to spearmint; peppermint (used in this recipe) is a naturally occurring hybrid of spearmint and another species.
- Ancient Egyptians used peppermint. In fact, dried peppermint leaves were discovered in pyramids that carbon dated to 1,000 BC.
- The name peppermint comes from a love triangle in Greek mythology. When Hades seduced the nymph Minthe, his wife, Persephone, became enraged with jealousy and turned Minthe into a low-lying plant that people will walk upon. Outraged by his wife's interference, Hades imbued the plant with peppermint, so whenever the plant was crushed underneath footfalls, it would release a wonderful aroma.
- Early 1900s: Wrigley Chewing Gum and Peppermint hard candy, LifeSavers, introduced
- 1877: Colgate toothpaste with peppermint flavoring introduced
- The U.S. produces 74% of the world's peppermint.
- Menthol is derived from peppermint oil.

Plant Parts

As with most herbs, we use both the leaves and the stems of the plant.

Nutrition

The nutritional value of mint is minimal in a regular serving size, but it is a low-calorie, nonfat food.

It is a good source of Dietary Fiber, Vitamin A, and Vitamin C.

Chocolate Peppermint Cream Bars

Makes 2-3 dozen Bottom Layer:

1 cup sugar
1/3 cup margarine
1 1/4 cups chocolate chips
1/2 cup soy milk
2/3 cup cocoa powder
3/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 scant cups flour
1/8 teaspoon salt

Peppermint Cream:

1/2 cup margarine
2 1/4 cups powdered sugar
2 teaspoons peppermint extract
3-4 drops green food coloring (optional, but attractive)
2 tablespoons soy milk, plus more if needed

Chocolate Layer:

1 1/4 cups chocolate chips
2 tablespoons shortening

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Bottom Layer: Melt the chocolate chips either in the microwave or in a glass bowl placed in boiling water. Remove from heat and stir in the soy milk and the cocoa powder. Cream together margarine and sugar with a strong fork, then add in the chocolate/soy milk/cocoa mixture and stir until incorporated. Add the vanilla, then the flour and salt. No need to sift.

In an 8×8-inch baking pan lined with parchment paper press out the dough evenly. Bake for 14-18 minutes or until the center is firm and the edges are done, then cool.

Peppermint Cream: Meanwhile, cream together the margarine and powdered sugar. Add in the peppermint extract and food coloring (if using). Gradually add the soy milk until the mixture kind of resembles frosting. If it's liquid, add more powdered sugar. If it's stiff or dry, add more soy milk. Chill in the fridge until the bottom layer is cooled.

Chocolate Layer (Make this at the last minute): Melt the chocolate chips and shortening in a glass bowl in boiling water, or over a double boiler.

Assembly: Spread the bottom layer evenly with peppermint cream, then chill in the freezer for about 5 minutes. Remove, then spread the top with the chocolate, creating a swirl pattern if you like. The chocolate will not spread out evenly due to the peppermint layer, but if you want it to be smooth, do a second layer of chocolate, halving the chocolate layer ingredients.

Let set, then cut as you like and enjoy!