

THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES



Key Lime Bars (from Cook's Illustrated)

Crust:

5 ounces animal crackers (about 1¼ cups crumbs)
3 tablespoons light or dark brown sugar packed
pinch salt
4 tablespoons butter, melted and cooled slightly

Filling:

2 ounces cream cheese, room temperature
1 tablespoon grated lime zest
1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
1 large egg yolk
½ cup key lime juice or regular juice (do not use bottled juice)

Garnish (optional):

shredded coconut, toasted until crisp

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 325 degrees. Cut about a 12-inch length of extra-wide heavy duty foil; fold the cut edges back to form a 7½-inch width. With the folded sides facing down, fit the foil securely into the bottom and up the sides of an 8-inch square baking pan, allowing the excess to overhang the pan sides. Spray the foil with non-stick cooking spray.
2. To make the crust: In the workbowl of a food processor, pulse the animal crackers until they're broken down, about ten 1-second pulses; then process the crumbs until evenly fine, about 10 seconds. Add the brown sugar and salt; process to combine, ten to twelve 1-second pulses. Drizzle the butter over the crumbs and pulse until the crumbs are evenly moistened with butter, about ten 1-second pulses. Press the crumbs evenly and firmly into the bottom of the prepared pan. Bake until deep golden brown, 18 to 20 minutes. Cool on a wire rack while making the filling. Do not turn off the oven.
3. To make the filling: While the crust cools, in a medium bowl, stir the cream cheese, zest and salt with rubber spatula until softened, creamy, and thoroughly combined. Add the sweetened condensed milk and whisk vigorously until it's incorporated and no lumps of cream cheese remain; whisk in the egg yolk. Add the lime juice and whisk gently until incorporated (the mixture will thicken slightly).
4. To assemble and bake: Pour the filling into the crust; spread to the corners and smooth the surface with a rubber spatula. Bake until set and the edges begin to pull away slightly from the sides, 15 to 20 minutes. Cool on a wire rack to room temperature, 1 to 1½ hours. Cover with foil and refrigerate until thoroughly chilled, at least 2 hours.
5. Loosen the edges with paring knife and lift the bars from the baking pan using the foil extensions; cut the bars into 16 squares. Sprinkle with toasted coconut if using, and serve. (Leftovers can be refrigerated up to two days; crust will soften slightly. Let stand at room temperature, about 15 minutes before serving.)