

SOFT GRANOLA BARS

These bars are healthy and filling. They are perfect for an on-the-go snack. Freeze extra bars in layers separated by wax paper. Remove from the freezer and thaw as needed.

10 large dates or 5 large dates and 5 prunes, pits and stems removed
1/2 cup warm apple juice or warm water
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons honey or agave nectar
2 tablespoons brown rice syrup or organic corn syrup
1/2 teaspoon stevia glycerite or 1/2 cup brown sugar
2 cups rolled oats
1-1/2 cups quick oats
1 cup high-fiber breakfast cereal
2 tablespoons wheat germ
2 tablespoons flaxseed meal or ground nuts
1/2 cup powdered milk or protein powder
3/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup sliced or chopped raw almonds
1 cup mixture of your choice (raisins/dried apricots/chocolate chips, dried cherries, dried blueberries)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a cookie sheet or a 9 by 13 inch oven-safe glass baking dish.

Place the dates in a blender, add the warm apple juice, let sit for a few minutes then pulse to chop the dates. Add the coconut oil, honey, brown rice syrup, and stevia, and puree until smooth.

In a large bowl, stir the rolled oats, quick oats, cereal, wheat germ, flaxseed meal, powdered milk, salt, nuts, and dried fruit. Add the wet ingredients to the dry and stir well to combine. The mixture should stick together; if it seems dry, add one tablespoon of honey.

Firmly press the mixture into the prepared pan and spread evenly. Bake on the center rack for 30 minutes or until the edges are brown. Remove from the oven, let cool for 10 minutes on a wire rack, then cut into bars. Let cool for another 20 minutes before carefully removing from the pan. These will keep for up to 2 weeks in an airtight container.

Yield: 20 bars

For **Cherry White Chocolate Chip Granola Bars**: Add 1/2 cup white chocolate chips and 1/2 cup dried cherries and eliminate the dried fruit mixture.

For **Spiced Granola Bars**: Add 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg and 1/8 teaspoon ground cloves or 1-1/2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice to the batter before baking.

TIP: To press bars into the pan, spray a spatula with cooking spray to prevent sticking.