



GORAN KOSANOVIC, For The Washington Post

# NUTS ABOUT GRANOLA

WHEN YOU MAKE YOUR OWN GRANOLA,  
IT CAN BE EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT IT TO BE

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Making granola is dead simple and ridiculously satisfying: You mix, bake, stir and then feel terrific about yourself and the pile of crunch you pull out of the oven.

It isn't the same as hacking Oreos, ketchup or Sriracha at home. That stuff is difficult, and perfection is tough to achieve. But granola? A cinch! What you make at home will not just be as good as what you typically purchase, I can guarantee it will be better. Fresher, too.

And, best of all, it will be exactly what you want. Don't like raisins? Skip 'em. Love cashews? Add 'em. Notice, I didn't say it would be cheaper. Good artisanal granola, made with excellent ingredients and no difficult-to-pronounce additives, is expensive in the stores and only slightly less expensive to make at home.

Savings might not be the prime reason to go DIY, but there are others: Homemade granola is fabulously delicious, pure and bespoke; the process is easy, fun and an all-around feel-good; and the cookie-like bites that you can also make from the mix are both adorable and tasty.

Perhaps this explains why, developing the accompanying recipe for you, I worked through what must have been a field of oats and now have six quarts of granola in my pantry.

You probably can make granola with something other than oats, but oats are the usual backbone of the mix. If you are gluten-intolerant, make sure you buy gluten-free oats.

And everyone should

look for old-fashioned rolled oats. Instant or quick-cooking ones won't produce the texture that's such a big part of why we love granola.

In the accompanying recipe, I've added a few fun ingredients: millet and flax for crunch; wheat germ for depth (if you're gluten-free, just add more oats); large coconut flakes for beauty, flavor and chew; vanilla to round all the flavors; and cocoa powder for surprise.

The combo is great, but you can mix it up by adding spices, if you'd like, or omitting some of the crunches. You can even leave out the cocoa, but why would you want to?

Because I'm a big fan of dried fruit, I add it to the granola, but at the very end, so that it doesn't get baked. Again, use what you love: snipped apricots, pears, figs, dates or apples (use scissors to cut the fruit into bite-size bits), golden or black raisins, cherries or cranberries.

The key is to make sure the dried fruit is moist, which is kind of oxymoronish, but important. Shriveled fruit is hard to eat and harder to enjoy. If yours isn't moist, give the fruit a good soak in hot water, pat it dry and then stir it into the just-baked granola.

If you want to make my Granola Bites — granola mixed with brown rice syrup, pressed into muffin tins and baked until they're super-crispy and puckish (think round energy bars) — spoon out the three cups of granola you'll need to make them and add the fruit to what's left in the bowl. Fruit baked into the bites has a tendency to harden and get overly browned.

## DORIE GREENSPAN'S COCOA CRUNCH FRUIT AND NUT GRANOLA

14 servings (makes 6½ cups to 7 cups granola)

### INGREDIENTS

- » ¼ cup (packed) light brown sugar
- » ¼ cup honey
- » 3 tablespoons coconut oil or olive oil
- » 2 cups old-fashioned oats (not instant or quick-cooking)
- » 1 cup mixed chopped nuts, such as almonds, pecans, walnuts, pistachios or hazelnuts
- » ½ cup hulled, unsalted pumpkin seeds
- » ½ cup hulled, unsalted sunflower seeds
- » 2 tablespoons wheat germ (may substitute old-fashioned oats)
- » 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- » 2 tablespoons millet (optional, but nice for crunch)
- » 1 tablespoon flaxseed (optional)
- » 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- » 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- » ½ cup unsweetened coconut flakes or shredded coconut
- » ½ cup moist, plump dried fruit, such as raisins, cranberries, cherries, snipped apricots, apples and/or pears (see note)

### DIRECTIONS

- » 1. Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven; preheat to 325 degrees. Have two 9-by-13-inch Pyrex baking dishes at hand. (If you have only metal pans, line them with parchment paper.)
- » 2. Combine the brown sugar, honey and coconut oil or olive oil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low and cook, stirring, just until the sugar dissolves.
- » 3. Combine the oats, nuts, pumpkin and sunflower seeds, wheat germ, cocoa powder, millet and flaxseed,

**VARIATION:** To make Granola Bites, preheat the oven to 300 degrees (instead of 325). Use baker's spray to generously grease the 24 wells of two standard-size muffin pans. Combine 3 cups of the baked granola (without dried fruit), ½ cup of brown rice syrup and 2 tablespoons of unsalted butter in a mixing bowl, stirring to coat evenly. Divide the mixture evenly among the muffin pan wells, using the bottom of a jar or glass wrapped in plastic wrap to compact the granola. Bake (middle rack) for 18 to 20 minutes, rotating the pans front to back halfway through, until the syrup, which will have bubbled, has settled down and the bites are deeply golden. Transfer the muffin pans to wire racks to cool for 5 minutes, then use a table knife to pop the bites out. Place them on racks to cool to room temperature before serving or storing.



**MAKE AHEAD:** Packed in tightly closed containers — humidity is granola's foe — the granola will keep for at least 1 month. The Granola Bites will be good for at least one week.

if using, and the sea salt in a large mixing bowl. Pour in the warm oil mixture, add the vanilla extract and stir, preferably with a flexible spatula, until everything is evenly moistened. Scrape the mixture into the baking dishes, gently spreading it out evenly. Bake on the upper and lower racks for 20 minutes, then stir, making sure to dislodge any bits that may have stuck to the baking dishes. Rotate the baking dishes top to bottom and front to back, stir and bake for 20 minutes.

- » 4. Stir once again, but this time stir in the shredded or flaked coconut. Bake for 5 minutes or until the coconut is very lightly toasted; the total baking time should be between 45 and 50 minutes. Scrape the baked granola into a big bowl, then stir in the dried fruit.
- » 5. Once the granola comes to room temperature, use your hands to break up the clumps that will have formed.

**NOTE:** While the granola is in the oven, check your dried fruit. If it's not soft and plump, put it in a bowl, cover with very hot tap water and let it soak for 5 to 10 minutes. Right before you're ready for it, drain the fruit and pat it dry.

## TAKEAWAY TIPS

**THE REAL MUSTS** in granola are oats, some kind of oil and a sweetener. For this granola, I use just three tablespoons of coconut or olive oil and a mix of brown sugar and honey. I've seen recipes without or with just a token amount of sugar, but I think it's nice to have something sweet to play off the earthy flavors in the granola and the salt, which I consider a necessity as well.

Once you've got these basics, just about everything else is up to you — the bespoke part. I like granola that has half as much nuts and seeds as oats, so I add pumpkin and sunflower seeds and a mix of whatever nuts I have on hand, which are typically almonds, pistachios and pecans. Although I suggest you chop the nuts, you don't have to; I've seen great granolas made with whole nuts, but I think those are better for snacking than for breakfasting or sprinkling over yogurt.