



Take a whirl at peanut butter

It doesn't take any fancy ingredients or tools to make your own nut butter at home.

By JACKIE BURRELL
San Jose Mercury News

There are few things more all-American than peanut butter, and we're not just talking about those iconic jars of Skippy and Jif. Their cousins — the all-natural, coarse-ground peanut, almond, walnut and other nut butter brethren — have been around since the days of peace, love and tie-dyed T-shirts.

But something has happened in the nut butter aisles that goes far beyond that Italian interloper, Nutella. All of a sudden, nut butters have gone artisanal with small batch jars and intriguing flavor twists.

New York City's Lee Zalben of Peanut Butter and Co. may have been one of the first to start swirling upscale jam and maple syrup into his all-natural peanut butter.

But here's the thing: You don't need anything fancy to do that at home — just nuts, a pinch of salt, a food processor and a little imagination, said Alana Chernila, the farmers market expert behind the new "Homemade Pantry" cookbook (Clarkson Potter, \$24.99, 288 pages).

Chernila is no fly-by-night DIYer. The Massachusetts mom and food writer makes her family's crackers, hot sauce, Pop-Tarts and 98 other comestibles. Nut butter, she says, is one of the easiest and most customizable do-it-yourself projects around.

"Everyone has different preferences. They want sweet or salty," she said. "You can create the nut butter of your dreams."

That sense of limitless possibility was what prompted Bruce Weinstein and Mark Scarbrough's nut butter experiments when they were working on their "Ultimate Peanut Butter Book" (Harper Collins, \$16.99, 256 pages). Soon they were combining cardamom and pistachios, ginger and toasted cashews, and pumpkin seeds and pecans.

"Don't forget your meat products," says Weinstein, who grew up in San Carlos. "Crispy, crumbled bacon is a lovely thing mashed into a peanut or almond butter."

Along the way, these nut butter aficionados discovered a few key things, too. There are ways to achieve that silky supermarket style, but it takes a little food processor finesse (see tips). And nut butter recipes are templates, not commandments.

Have fun with flavors, but if you're taking a shortcut by using flavored nuts — honey-roasted cashews, for example — be wary of flavor intensity and salt.

"A lot of flavored nuts are very salty," Weinstein said. Use a light hand with flavorings and don't flavor the whole batch.

"Two or three with a gin and tonic is nice — but it's not necessarily nice on a sandwich."

But all bets are off when chocolate enters the picture.

"A natural version of nutella is dangerous," Katzen says. "It's hard to stop eating it."

Homemade nut butter

Makes about 1½ cups

- 1 pound (3½ cups) shelled, raw nuts
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 2 teaspoons honey
- 1-4 tablespoons canola or peanut oil, depending on the nuts

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spread the nuts on a baking sheet and roast for 10-15 minutes, or just until they begin to brown. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and allow the nuts to cool slightly.

Place the nuts, salt and honey in the bowl of a food processor. Blend for 20 seconds. With the motor still running, drizzle a tablespoon of oil into the bowl through the chute in the lid, and process for 30 seconds. If the nut butter is still dry, continue to blend and add additional oil, a little at a time. Process for up to another minute to reach your desired consistency. Taste and adjust for salt, if needed, and stir in any flavorings you wish.

Keeps refrigerated in a covered container for up to 1 month.

From "The Homemade Pantry" by Alana Chernila (Clarkson Potter, \$24.99, 288 pages)

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Simple steps



Start by pouring the prepared nuts — in this case roasted and cooled almonds — into the food processor.



After the nuts are ground up for about 20 seconds, add the flavors such as honey or salt.



After adding the flavors, pour oil in a steady stream while the processor runs.



Scrape the sides of the processor bowl and add oil if necessary.

Nut butter secrets

- Roast the nuts to boost their flavor, before you turn them into nut butter.
 - Use a full-size food processor, not a mini. You'll burn a mini's motor out before the butter is the right texture.
 - If you use a blender for nut butter, spray the inside first with cooking spray.
 - Most nut butters need a little oil. Add it slowly. You can always add more. But once it's in, there's no going back.
 - Adding a little dairy butter, as well as oil, will give the spread nice flavor and texture.
 - A little honey or agave syrup adds sweetness, without the grit of sugar.
 - Despite what it says on the label, all classic supermarket peanut butter is creamy. If you're trying to replicate the texture of commercial chunky-style, make smooth peanut butter and mix nut bits in.
 - For perfectly smooth nut butter, grind the nuts longer and give them a cooling-off period halfway through.
- The heat from the food processor helps the fat in the nuts melt, Bruce Weinstein says, but at a certain point, the oils begin to separate: "If you want to be a perfectionist, as soon as it starts getting a little oily, let it cool off for an hour, then start again."

Nut butter twists

- Pistachio butter with cardamom
- Cashew butter with ginger
- Almond butter with espresso syrup
- Peanut butter with toasted coconut and dried pineapple
- Pecan butter with toffee bits
- Peanut butter with cinnamon and raisins
- Hazelnut butter with chocolate
- Walnut butter with cinnamon
- Peanut butter with crisp, crumbled bacon
- Peanut butter with cayenne and garlic paste

Bonus recipe

Here's a nut butter recipe using cashews, courtesy of Courtney Cashour at smartmagpa.com.

Cashew butter

- 2 cups toasted cashews
- 2 tablespoons honey
- ½ cup walnut oil (you can purchase this at Giant in the olive oil/cooking oil aisle)
- 1 teaspoon salt

In a food processor or blender, mix the cashews and salt. Pulse until you get a fine mixture. In the meantime, in the microwave, heat the honey for 30 seconds. Combine the walnut oil with the honey. Slowly add the mixture to the cashews as you continue to hit the pulse button.

Note: If your mixture is too thick, you may add additional oil.



Save some money by making your own blended iced coffee.

Make your own 'frappy'

ABBY RHOAD

Best of the blogs

I think every day should have frappy hour. But I can't afford it.

What's frappy hour, you ask? That's the time of day when I savor a tasty, frosty Starbucks frappuccino, or a blended iced coffee, on my way to work at 4:30 in the afternoon.

I find it to be a great balance between a smoothie and milkshake and wonderfully refreshing on hot, summer days when I can't quite drink a steaming hot latte.

But if you're like me, and can't afford to shell out \$5 a day for a frappuccino, never fear. Read on, and you too can have frappy hour every day.

This recipe makes an 18- to 20-ounce frappuccino.

Step 1. Brew your espresso — about 2 shots.

I have a wonderful aunt who got me a Mr. Coffee espresso maker. It has saved me, at this point, probably thousands of dollars through the years. (My Starbucks habit was pretty out of control when I worked within walking distance from one.)

The handy machine brews espresso and froths milk, so it serves double-duty in the winter: lattes when I need a pick-me-up and steamers when I just want some flavored, steamed milk before bed. When I do fraps, I put an ice cube in the pitcher because I don't want to pour hot espresso onto the ice in the blender.

Step 2. Add about 9 to 11 medium-sized ice cubes to the blender.

Step 3. Pick your poison: caramel, hazelnut, peppermint mocha, amaretto, vanilla.

Use any of your favorite flavored syrups. Experiment and try new combinations. One of my favorites is peppermint mocha chip.

I use about 1 shot of dark chocolate-flavored syrup (regular chocolate syrup that you put on ice cream works, too). Because peppermint syrup is quite strong, I use about half of a shot of peppermint syrup. I also add 1 tablespoon of mini chocolate chips. I really like chocolate, what can I say?

Step 4. Add about two shots of milk. I use skim, but any milk will do.

Step 5. Finally, add 1 to 2 shots of espresso to the blender.

Step 6. Blend.

If you like your frappuccino a little frostier, decrease the amount of milk. If you like them a little thinner, add more milk. I also prefer to go sans whipped cream to make it healthier, but add it if you want. You can also add a little chocolate syrup drizzle to the top.

Step 7. Sit back and sip.

Find more stories about cooking and food at smartmagpa.com.

Cricket's Answer for Cancer



Sleeves benefit nonprofit

Maternity-wear designer Liz Lange has designed a sleeve for lymphedema patients to partly benefit local nonprofit Cricket's Answer for Cancer.

The sleeve — cheetah print with a tinted violet background — is available through Lymphedivas, a medical fashion company.

A portion of each sale will go to Cricket's Answer for Cancer, an organization that offers assistance with cancer-related needs.

For details, visit www.lymphedivas.com or call 717-843-7903.

Best bet

Learn about hobo life

Ever wonder what it was like to be a hobo?

Head over to the Hanover Junction Train Station from 7 to 8 p.m. today to learn about the life of a hobo.

Tim Winter will provide banjo music during the program.

Visit yorkcounty.parks.org for more information.

To find more events, visit flipsidepa.com.



Seasonal recipe contest

Enter for June

To embrace the growing season in York County, the York Daily Record/Sunday News and Smart magazine have launched a Seasonal Recipe Contest, which kicked off in May and runs through October.

Each month, we will challenge readers to enter a recipe using a seasonal fruit or veggie of our choice. We'll ask that you make the recipe and take a photo of it. A random winner will be chosen each month and will receive a \$25 gift card. For June, submit a recipe made from strawberries or peas.

Email your recipe and photo to lzaleski@ydr.com by June 30. It must be an original photo. If the recipe is adapted, please include the original source. Also include your full name, age, the municipality in which you live and your telephone number.

Tomorrow



As more women are called to the pulpit, it means there are more moms among the ranks of pastors.