



Strength in Plants *By Kate Murray*

Sometimes, you just need a treat

BAR COOKIES have been a homemade staple in my family for generations, beginning more than 30 years ago with my mom's famous apricot bars.

Every now and then as you embark on your own journey toward wholesome foods and personal healing, I think it's important to enjoy a truly delectable dessert. Living a healthy lifestyle encourages you to make important changes in the way you eat and view food, because let's face it, it is stressful not only on yourself but on your entire family when you choose to eat fewer animals and more plants.

The stress of the transition has a way of creeping up on you and insidiously wearing you down, even if you don't realize it. I credit some local gals from my healthy cooking club for formulating this recipe, and now I'm thrilled to share a much healthier version of a bar cookie.

It began as trial and error, as we tried to follow a recipe for turning shredded coconut into a cream (which most raw foodies call coconut butter) for the bar. The

first time was a complete bust, too much liquid, so we stuck it in the freezer and it froze solid after just 20 minutes. Needless to say, a well-choreographed plant-based recipe takes a lot of practice and a lot of patience. Using fresh, simple ingredients that are easily accessible is the key to transforming that pantry full of oats and nuts into a brilliant dessert.

This nourishing pastry should help you maintain your plant-based lifestyle but still offers a little treat that is more nutritious than the traditional options. Always keep in mind, though, the most important factor in making any new routine stick is to have a solid support network of family and friends to help hold you accountable and realize your goals. It's kind of like having a friend or a personal trainer waiting for you at the gym at 6 a.m. If you make changes slowly, together with your spouse or significant other, you're more likely to stick to your new lifestyle because you both feel great.

Take these maple coconut bars to your next dinner party. It'll be sure to help you win over any doubters.

Maple Coconut Bars

CRUST

1 cup raw cashews
1 cup walnuts
About 8 pitted Medjool dates
(or about 1 cup if using dry, chopped)
Juice and zest of 1 freshly squeezed lemon
1 teaspoon freshly ground ginger
(½ teaspoon if using dry)
1 teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
1 cup oat bran (if you can't find oat bran, just process unsweetened, dry oats finely)

FROSTING

1 cup of raw coconut butter (recipe follows; this is not coconut oil)
3 tablespoons maple syrup

Prep: Process the crust ingredients in a food processor until chunky and sticky, and then spread evenly into a parchment lined 9x12 baking dish. Bake the crust at 350 degrees for about 20 minutes and set aside to cool.

To make coconut butter, I recommend using full fat coconut only. Important: Make sure the only ingredient in the package is coconut flakes. There is a variety



of sweetened versions of coconut flakes available (I have tested at least six different brands) and trust me, the added ingredients will not turn your coconut into butter. Stick with the organic brands. I recommend Bob's Red Mill or Shiloh Hills, which can be purchased locally at Abundance Foragers (the coffee stand) at the Shillington Farmer's Market. Also, it is not recommended to attempt this recipe using low-fat coconut; again, it will not cream properly into butter.

Process the coconut in a food processor or high speed blender (such as a Vitamix) for about two minutes, scraping down the sides. There are no other ingredients necessary to turn the coconut into butter. Watch it carefully; the mixture becomes the consistency of peanut butter quickly. Add the maple syrup at the end and pulse once or twice to combine.

Spread the frosting on the bars and refrigerate for about 10 minutes to set the frosting. ☺

Kate Murray is certified in plant-based nutrition and the author of "A Silent Cure in My Back Yard." Find more recipes at: asilentcure.org.



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