



# MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

When you make old-fashioned candy in your microwave oven, you get an extra bonus. Not only do you get perfect candy, you also get convenience -- both in the cooking and the cleanup.

I'll clarify that "perfect candy" statement a bit. You'll get perfect candy if you understand a little about conventional candy making, follow candy-making rules and judge doneness correctly.

Now to explain the microwave bonus -- convenience. First, cooking is faster. Second, there's no need to stir or watch candy constantly during cooking. Stirring once to dissolve the sugar after a few minutes of cooking is the most stirring needed for most recipes. (The exception is caramels.) Watching closely for the last minute or two to check for doneness is necessary. (However, watch closely throughout cooking when trying or adapting a new recipe.)

Then there's the convenience of cleanup. After making candy, fill the sugar-coated bowl with hot water, slip the microwave candy thermometer on the side, and cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Microwave on High until boiling. Then let stand, still covered, when the steam melts the sugar. A quick wash in sudsy water and you're all set to make another batch.

Even boil-overs are easy to clean up. Wipe them up right away with a damp cloth. Even if you decide to wait, the hot sugar won't burn onto the microwave floor or create a terrible odor. Microwave candy making is similar to conventional --

Cooking perfect candy in your microwave is much like cooking

perfect candy on a conventional range. It's important to use the proper equipment and follow directions.

To brush up on candy-making knowledge, read a reliable conventional cookbook. You'll learn that cooking to the right doneness is one way to ensure perfect candy. Candy is cooked to the same doneness in the microwave as when it's cooked on the range.

In conventional candy making, use of a candy thermometer is important. The old cold-water test is mentioned as an unreliable way to judge doneness. In microwave candy making, a special microwave candy thermometer is important for convenience and the most accuracy. A regular candy thermometer can't be left in candy during microwaving. A temperature probe doesn't register high enough for candy making.

Acu-Rite Microwave Candy/Food Thermometer is -- as far as I know -- the only microwave candy thermometer made. It's often hard to find in stores. Look for it in hardware, discount, microwave, gourmet, and kitchen stores. I've also seen it in some large supermarkets by other small kitchen utensils. If you can't find a microwave candy thermometer, I have them available by mail order. Send a check for \$9 for each thermometer (includes shipping and my "Microwave Candies" leaflet of 10 microwave candy recipes and hints) to me at RR2, Box 162, Gaylord, MN 55334.

Try these delicious low-fat candies --

Today's recipes make rich-tasting indulgences. But they're low in saturated fat and cholesterol,

so you can enjoy them in moderation or offer them to friends without pangs of guilt.

Start microwaving these, and other candy, covered with plastic wrap until candy boils. The tight cover holds in steam, which washes sugar crystals off the container and helps prevent sugary candy. (Leave top of microwave candy thermometer sticking out of plastic wrap so thermometer stays cool enough to handle.)

After candy boils, stir well until you see and hear that the sugar is dissolved. Continue microwaving, uncovered, until candy reaches correct temperature. If the mixture starts to boil over, quickly open the door and switch to a lower power setting. Closely watch caramel, fudge, and other candies that contain milk or cream. Usually no cooking time is given in conventional candy recipes. In microwave recipes time is given, but don't go by time alone. Time simply is not accurate. Your microwave may cook faster or slower, or your ingredients may be at a different starting temperature than those used when testing the recipe. Candy is done when it reaches the temperature given in a recipe.

### Creamy

#### Peanut Butter Fudge

- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup chunk-style peanut butter
- 1 jar (7 ounces) marshmallow creme
- 1/2 cup chopped peanuts (optional)

Butter an 8x8-inch metal pan. Or line pan with a double layer of waxed paper, extending waxed paper about 2 inches on 2 sides.

In a microwave-safe, heat-resistant 2-quart measure, stir together sugar and milk. Cover

with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 3 minutes, or until boiling. Stir well until sugar is dissolved. Microwave on Medium (50 percent power, 325-350 watts), uncovered, 8 to 11 minutes, until candy thermometer registers 247° F (firm ball stage). Remove candy thermometer. With a wooden spoon quickly stir in peanut butter, marshmallow creme, and peanuts until well combined. Pour into prepared pan. Cool at room temperature. Before serving, cut into 49 squares. Makes about 2 pounds.

Each square: 81 calories, 2g protein, 3g fat, 13g carbohydrate, 37mg sodium, 0 cholesterol.

Note: Cooking of this fudge is unique in two ways. It is microwaved on Medium to prevent boil-overs in the 2-quart measure. It should cook to a higher stage than most fudges because it is not beaten and the ingredients added after cooking add little firmness.

Hint: For best flavor and creaminess, allow this (and other fudges) to "ripen" at least one day before serving. To keep fudge soft and creamy, store it uncut in an airtight container in a cool place, refrigerator, or freezer.

#### Butterscotch Nut Clusters

- 1 package (3 1/2 ounces) regular butterscotch pudding and pie filling
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup whole milk
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 1/2 cups salted peanuts or mixed nuts

Line 2 large cookie sheets with waxed paper; set aside.

In a microwave-safe, heat-resistant 2-quart measure, stir

together dry pudding mix, sugar and milk. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 2 to 3 minutes, or until at a rolling boil. Stir well until sugar is dissolved. Stir in butter and nuts. Microwave (High), uncovered, 3 to 4 minutes, until candy thermometer registers 234° F. Cool 15 minutes. Beat with a wooden spoon until mixture just begins to thicken and turn cloudy. Do not scrape bowl sides. Working quickly, drop by teaspoonfuls onto prepared pan. Cool at room temperature. Store in tightly covered container in a cool place, refrigerator, or freezer. Makes about 28 clusters.

Hint: If candy thickens too much during dropping, cover cooking dish with plastic wrap and microwave 20 to 30 seconds or until slightly melted around edges. Stir until smooth.

Each candy: 89 calories, 2g protein, 4g fat, 12g carbohydrate, 59mg sodium, 2mg cholesterol.


### Questions for Joyce?

Do you have a question about microwave cooking? Send it to Microwave Minutes, % Extra Newspaper Features, P.O. Box 6118, Rochester, MN 55903. Please include a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope.


Recipes in this column are tested in 600- and 650-watt microwave ovens. With an oven of different wattage output, timings may need slight adjustment.

Joyce Battcher is an independent home economist microwave specialist. She is author of "Microwave Family Favorites" and editor of "A Batch of Ideas" newsletter.


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