

Ben Hicks' Christmas Caramels

1 cup butter (2 sticks)
1 cup dark brown sugar
1 1/4 cups light brown sugar
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 cup white Karo syrup
1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla

Over medium heat and in a heavy saucepan, melt butter, then stir in sugar and salt. Stir in syrup and condensed milk. Cook till the thermometer hits 245 degrees Fahrenheit, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla. Pour into buttered 9-by-13-inch pan. When it's cool, cut into small, candy-sized pieces and wrap each piece in waxed paper.

Ben Hicks' Tollhouse Plus Cookies

2 1/4 cups all purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup butter, softened
3/4 cup granulated sugar
3/4 cup packed brown sugar
3 teaspoons vanilla
2 large eggs
1 tablespoon milk (this is optional)
2 cups Nestle Tollhouse Semi-Sweet Chocolate Morsels
1 cup coarsely chopped walnuts

Heat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.

Combine flour, baking soda and salt in bowl. Beat butter, sugars and vanilla until creamy. Add eggs, one at a time and beat well after each addition. Gradually beat in flour mixture. Stir in morsels and nuts. Drop by rounded spoonfuls onto ungreased baking sheet.

Bake for 9 to 11 minutes or until golden brown. Cool on baking sheets for a few minutes and remove to wire racks to cool completely.

Makes about 5 dozen.

Ben Hicks' Shepherd's Pie

1 pound ground beef (or turkey)
1 onion, diced
1 package sliced mushrooms
1 package onion gravy
A couple of handfuls of frozen peas (or peas with carrots)
Leftover mashed potatoes or a tub of premade mashed potatoes
1 can fried onions (like Durkee)

Brown the ground beef. Saute the onion and mushrooms. Make the gravy according to package instructions. Mix the beef, onions, mushrooms, gravy and peas or other veggies and let simmer for a few minutes in the pan. Mix the potatoes with 1/2 the can of fried onions. Dump the meat mixture into a casserole dish and spread the potatoes on top. Sprinkle the remaining fried onions on top of it all and bake at 350 Fahrenheit for about 20 minutes.

Serve. I like mine with a hefty splash of Emeril's Kick it Up Red Pepper Sauce.