

Cleo Coyle's (Best Ever) Pecan Pie Bars or Bites

Photos and text (c) by Alice Alfonsi
who writes [The Coffeehouse Mysteries](#) as
[Cleo Coyle](#) with her husband, Marc Cerasini.

Pecan pie bars are classic treats. After experimenting with different types of crusts and topping ingredients, I believe this version is **the best**, and here's why...

(1) Cream Cheese Crust: Because cream cheese does not melt as easily as butter, it makes a dough that is easier to work with yet it's still flaky. I've adjusted the ratio of flour to fat to create the perfect press-in crust, one that's tender but also strong enough to hold its shape for a bar. But the main reason I'm using this crust is for flavor. The slightly tangy (yet tender) crust creates a delicious counterpoint to the very sweet pecan topping. It's a marriage made in culinary heaven!

(2) Chopped Pecans: My bars use coarsely chopped pecans instead of whole halves like many recipes. Chopping the nuts allows more surface area to be exposed to the hot sugar, creating more tasty caramelization.

(3) Combo of Dark Corn (or Cane) + Maple Syrups:

Maple syrup gives a beautiful flavor to pecan pie and some bakers use it instead of dark corn (or sugarcane) syrup. I split the difference for two reasons: Maple syrup can be pricey. But that's not the only reason. The bold, earthy flavor of dark corn syrup (or a more traditional sugarcane syrup like [Steen's](#)) is such a classic flavor in pecan pie that leaving it out would be, well, just wrong. So my recipe uses half maple for flavor and a lesser amount of dark corn (or sugar cane) syrup for that earthy traditional note.

(4) Troubleshooting: You'll find tips and advice throughout this recipe. These little reminders are for me as much as you. They help me achieve a nearly perfect end product. Why *nearly* perfect? Because while perfection is a common goal, it's overrated. Or as my amateur sleuth, coffeehouse manager Clare Cosi, once put it in my *Coffeehouse Mysteries*: "being good is better than being perfect." The spin on that old adage is still as valid as ever. And these bars may not be perfect, but they are very good!

~ Cleo Coyle, author of
[The Coffeehouse Mysteries](#)
Where coffee and crime are always brewing...



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Ingredients:

For the press-in cream cheese crust

1/2 cup unsalted butter (1 stick), slightly softened
3/4 cup cream cheese, slightly softened
1/2 cup white, granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon finely ground sea salt or table salt
1-1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
2-1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 large egg white (save yolk for filling)

For the whisk-together pecan pie filling

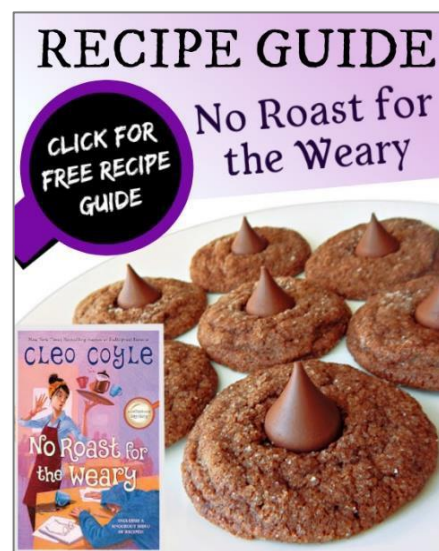
2 Tablespoons unsalted butter
1/2 cup maple syrup
1/4 cup dark corn (or sugarcane) syrup
1 Tablespoon cornstarch
1/2 cup light brown sugar, packed
1/2 cup white, granulated sugar
1-1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
3/4 teaspoon finely ground sea salt or table salt
3 large eggs (room temperature is best) +
1 egg yolk (save egg white for brushing crust)
2 cups coarsely chopped pecans (measure after chopping)

Directions:

Step 1 – Prep pan: In your 9 x 13-inch baking pan, create a crisscrossing sling out of parchment paper so you can remove the slab of pecan pie and easily cut it into bars.



Two Tips: If you butter or spray the pan first, it will act like glue to keep the parchment neatly in place. I would also suggest lightly buttering the paper or coating with non-stick spray.



Free Recipe Guide to
Cleo's new culinary mystery
No Roast for the Weary:
[click here.](#)



Step 2 – Make the easy press-in crust: Using an electric mixer, cream the butter, cream cheese, sugar, salt, and vanilla until light and fluffy. Stop the mixer. Add the flour. Blend until the dough makes coarse crumbs. If a dough forms, instead of crumbs, don't worry. It simply means your butter and cream cheese were a little too soft! Pour these crumbs (or the dough you've made) into the pan and press it evenly along the bottom and up the sides of the pan at least half an inch. This crust edge will prevent the loose filling from spilling beneath the crust and ruining the bars. Here are a few more helpful tips for perfect bars...



Tips for perfect press-in crusts:

Cover the crumbly dough with plastic wrap and use the side of a glass to roll dough into an even layer. Use the bottom of your glass to press the corners into a smooth crust. >>>

Once again: Make sure you **press that crust up the sides of the pan**. This is important because it will keep the filling from spilling over the edge, which will ruin the bars.

<< Flute edges as shown, and use a fork to thin them out. You don't want edges that are overly thick. The fork tines create a more even texture.



Chill it, baby! Re-cover with plastic wrap and put the pan in the fridge and chill it for at least 30 minutes. This is very important to getting good results. The chilled dough going into the hot oven will make a flakier, more tender crust.

Pre-heat well: Your oven should be well pre-heated to 375° F. You want a hot oven and 30 minutes of pre-heating will ensure the temperature is hot enough.

Step 3 – Make easy filling: While your crust is chilling, place a large saucepan on the stove. Over low heat, melt the butter and **remove from heat**.

Off the heat, stir in maple and dark corn syrups. Add cornstarch and whisk until fully dissolved. Add the two sugars, vanilla, salt. Fork-whisk eggs separately and beat them in very well until the batter is smooth. Stir in chopped pecans, coat well. Set aside.



Step 4 – Prep Crust and Bake: Remove plastic wrap from your chilled crust. Prick crust all over with fork tines to prevent it from rising up during baking. Now protect it with egg wash...

Create an **egg wash** by whisking one egg white with a few drops of water. Use a pastry brush to lightly coat bottom and sides of crust. You are creating a barrier between the crust and filling.

**Bake crust about 12 to 15 minutes
in your well-preheated
375° F oven.**



The crust will turn a very light brown. When you first pull it out of the oven, you may see areas that are puffed. That's okay. Allow the pan to cool 5 minutes or so and the crust will settle back down, looking like this. >>>

Step 5 – Final bake: While the crust is still warm, slowly and carefully pour on the filling; you can even ladle it on to make sure that none of it sloshes over the crust edges and beneath the crust, which will ruin the bars (ask me how I know).

If you're afraid the pan is getting too full, simply hold back a bit of the liquid filling, but use all of the chopped pecans. (All of the filling should fit if you pressed that crust up the sides of the pan as directed.) No matter what, keep that loose filling inside the edges!

Return the full pan to your 375° F oven...



Step 6 - Baking time notes: To prevent the ends from over-baking and the middle from under-baking, carefully **rotate the pan** (don't spill the filling) after 10 minutes of baking and **place foil loosely over the top of the pan**. Bake another 15 to 20 minutes...

For a total of 25 to 30 minutes final baking time.

When is it done? You are watching for the top of the filling to set. It may even puff up a little. There should be no liquid-looking areas. If there are, remove the foil and bake 5 minutes more and check again, but be careful not to burn the crust or scorch the pecan topping.



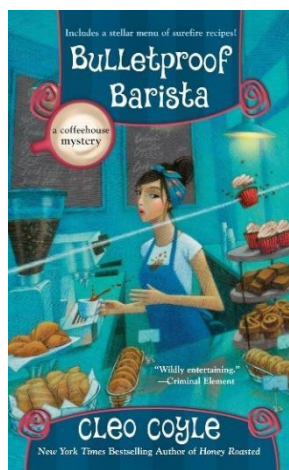
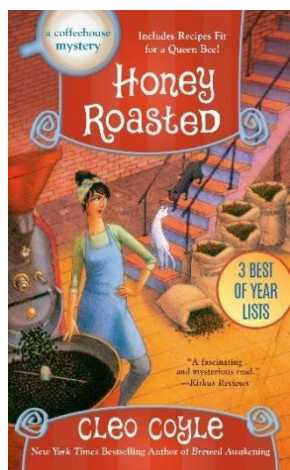
Remember that after the bars come out of the oven, they will continue to cook in the hot pan so do not over-cook them!

Before cutting the bars, they must cool off completely.



After removing the pan from the oven, allow the pecan pie slab to sit in the hot pan, **undisturbed for at least 1 hour**.

Quick tip: For perfectly clean cuts, chill them in the fridge before cutting. Use the handles of the parchment paper to lift the slab carefully out of the pan and onto a flat surface. Then cut into beautiful, caramel-topped pecan bars or smaller squares for pecan bites!



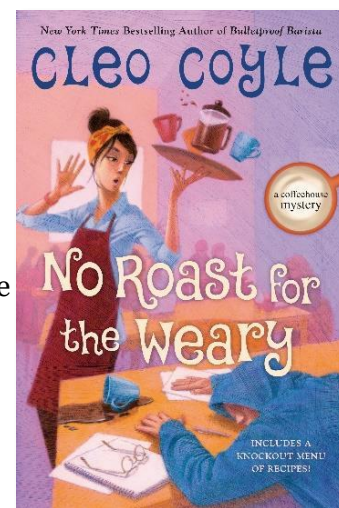
Eat with joy! ~ Cleo

The [Coffeehouse Mysteries](http://www.CoffeehouseMystery.com) are bestselling culinary mysteries, set in a landmark Greenwich Village coffeehouse. Each includes the added bonus of recipes. To learn more and see more recipes, visit Cleo Coyle's online coffeehouse at

www.CoffeehouseMystery.com

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