



Popcorn Caramel Apples



Crispy Crunchy Apple Popcorn

Flavors of the Harvest

The fall harvest brings a close to farmer's efforts during the spring and summer months. The abundant produce helps feed the farmer's family, and is shared with both the surrounding community and markets from coast-to-coast.

Now is the perfect time to help your children understand the role of agriculture in the foods we eat everyday. Throughout the country, local farms invite young and old alike to find their way through corn mazes in the crisp autumn air and to take part in the fall harvest by picking your own apples, peaches, berries and pumpkins.

A trip to a local farm lets you to experience firsthand the taste of a peach, plucked right from the branch. And with today's growing concern for weight and obesity issues, it's important to provide children with positive experiences with healthful and nutritious foods. Plus, a walk in the fresh air will do you good.

Once you're home with your bounty of Braeburns, try your hand at the following recipes which include another timely fall harvest crop—popcorn—to create fun treats the whole family will enjoy. Making popcorn on the stove also is a learning experience for younger generations who know little of popping popcorn the "old-fashioned" way.

The first recipe calls for dried apple chips, which you can purchase from your local grocer. But making your own chips is surprisingly easy and a great way to use some of your freshly picked peck.

Crispy Crunchy Apple Popcorn

- 6 cups popped popcorn
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 cups dried apple chips

- Preheat oven to 300° F. Line a 9 x 13-inch baking pan with foil; butter foil. Spread popcorn in pan and drizzle with melted butter; toss popcorn.
- Sprinkle popcorn with sugar and cinnamon and toss again. Heat in oven 7 minutes. Sprinkle apple chips over popcorn and heat an additional 3 minutes. Serve warm or cool to room temperature. Store in an airtight container.

Yield: 7 cups

Perfect Popcorn Popping Tips

Nothing's better than a great batch of popcorn. Here are a few tips for perfect popping, every time.

- Warm a heavy pan or skillet with lid. Add approximately 1/4 cup of vegetable oil to the pan, just enough to cover the bottom.
- Drop in two or three kernels and cover. When the kernels pop, add the remaining popcorn. Pour just enough kernels to cover the bottom of the pan. Again, cover with the lid.
- Shake the pan while the kernels heat and pop. Occasionally lift the lid slightly to allow steam to escape. When you hear the last few pops, remove the pan from the heat, take off the lid and empty the popped popcorn into a large bowl.

Oven Dried Apple Chips

- Heat oven to 200°. Cut off the bottoms of the apples and core. Thinly slice the apples (no more than an eighth of an inch thick) or use a mandoline for greater uniformity.
- Line baking sheet with a foil and place apple slices in a single layer.

- Do not overlap. Sprinkle with cinnamon, nutmeg or confectioners' sugar if desired.
- Bake for 1 to 2 hours. Cool completely on a wire rack. Store in an airtight container.

Popcorn Caramel Apples

- 1 quart popped popcorn
- 1 (9.5 oz.) package caramels, unwrapped (35 caramels)
- 1/4 cup light cream or 'half and half'
- 4 lollipop sticks (or wooden candy apple sticks)
- 4 apples
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips
- Sugar sprinkles
- Decorative ribbon, optional

- Place popcorn in a large bowl; set aside. Place a sheet of waxed paper on work surface.
- Heat caramels and cream in a small sauce pan over medium-low heat. Stir frequently until caramels are melted and cream is blended into caramels.
- Push a stick into an apple center and dip into caramel. Spoon caramel over apple to coat completely. Place caramel-coated apple into bowl of popcorn and press popcorn onto caramel to cover completely. Place apple on waxed paper to set; repeat with remaining apples.
- Place chocolate chips in a small, resealable plastic bag. Microwave 10 seconds and press chips to aid melting. Repeat, heating at 10-second intervals, until chips are completely melted. Cut a small corner off bag and squeeze chocolate onto each apple allowing chocolate to drip down sides. Sprinkle with sugar sprinkles.
- Tie a bow to each apple stick, if desired. To serve, cut apple into slices.

Yield: 4