

Take a Tropical Snack Break



Ah, the tropics. The very word conjures images of palm trees, island breezes, sandy shores, lush foliage, colorful birds, and much, much more, all of it enticing.

Unfortunately for most of us, a visit to the far-away tropics isn't exactly practical. Perhaps that explains why island flavors and Caribbean cuisine are so popular—if we can't get to the tropics, then by gosh we'll just bring them to us! Bring on the swordfish with citrus salsa, the fried plantains and the key lime pie!

But wait...as tasty as that all sounds, it also sounds like a lot of time in the kitchen. Perhaps a tropical snack break is just the ticket.

And since you'll need to leave room for a frosty beverage or a slice of the aforementioned key lime pie, you'll need that snack to be on the light and healthy side.

Enter popcorn. Naturally low in fat and calories and a whole grain, popcorn pairs beautifully with the energy-packed goodness of tropical fruits and nuts.

This recipe for Tropical Fruit and Nut Popcorn Bars combines the crunch of fresh popcorn and almonds with creamy peanut butter and honey, studded with bursts of intense fruit flavor from tropical dried fruits. The bars are super-simple to prepare, making them an ideal take-along for your next trip to the hammock or a backyard luau.

Tropical Fruit and Nut Popcorn Bars

Warning: This recipe contains peanuts

1 cup honey
1 1/3 cups peanut butter
1 (6 ounce) bag tropical dried fruit bits
1 cup sliced almonds
4 cups popped popcorn

- Line a 9x13-inch baking pan with foil. Spray foil lightly with cooking spray; set aside.
- Heat honey in a large saucepan until boiling. Stir in peanut butter until well blended. Remove pan from heat and stir in fruit bits, almonds and popcorn until coated. Scoop and press mixture evenly into prepare pan. Refrigerate until cool. Cut into bars to serve.

Yield: 32 bars

Kids of all ages will enjoy both the name and the triple crunch punch of Coconut Monkey Mix. The mix combines fresh popcorn, flaked coconut and dried banana chips, all tossed together with butter, sugar, salt and a hint of nutmeg. It's a tropical treat that's hard to beat.

Coconut Monkey Mix

1 cup flaked coconut (unsweetened or sweetened)
6 cups popped popcorn
1 tablespoon butter or margarine, melted
1 teaspoon sugar
1/8 teaspoon salt
dash of nutmeg
1 cup dried banana chips

- Preheat oven to 325° F. Spread coconut in a 13x9-inch baking pan, breaking up any clumps as needed. Bake 10 minutes or until edges of coconut begin to brown.
- Spread popcorn over coconut and sprinkle with melted butter; toss. Sprinkle popcorn mixture with sugar, salt and nutmeg; toss. Bake 5 minutes longer and toss with banana chips. Serve immediately or cool and store in an airtight container.

Yield: 7 cups



Coconut Monkey Mix