

# Pumpkin Coconut Squares are scrumptious treat for Halloween

By Sara Moulton

Here's a scrumptious treat for Halloween. It happens to be too delicate to give away to the trick-or-treaters, but it's just right for y-o-u and your family and friends at a Halloween party or dinner. Preparing Pumpkin Coconut Squares takes some time, but it's mostly waiting time, not hands-on time. This beauty is four layers thick, and two of them require time to set up. There's a gingersnap crust on the bottom, a layer of pumpkin/coconut milk puree, a layer of tart cream cheese and a topping of toasted coconut flakes.

If you've ever dug into a pumpkin pie or dessert and wondered where the flavor went, I can pinpoint the problem: Pumpkin puree is terribly watery whether it's fresh or canned. It occurred to me that draining it would concentrate the flavor, and here's how to do it: First, wrap it in a layer of cheesecloth, then tie the cheesecloth like a hobo's sack to a chopstick, skewer, or dinner

knife, and finally hang the sack over a deep bowl. Let it drip, drip, drip for eight hours or overnight. Afterward, there will be a fair amount of water at the bottom of the bowl - and even more in the cheesecloth. Squeeze the cheesecloth gently to remove the additional water.

When you're done, you will have captured and eliminated anywhere from 1/2 cup to 3/4 cup water from the puree. (If you don't have cheesecloth, a coffee filter will do the trick.) Be sure to use pumpkin puree, not pumpkin pie filling, which is presweetened. If you're inclined to lighten up the recipe, swap in light coconut milk, one-third-less-fat cream cheese and unsweetened coconut flakes for the specified full-fat ingredients. Then again, it is Halloween and these Pumpkin Coconut Squares are an old-fashioned holiday treat. Feel free to enjoy the uncensored version.



## Ingredients

Start to finish: 11 hours, 20 minutes (30 active)

Servings: Makes 36 squares

One 15-ounce can pumpkin puree (not pie filling)

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided, plus extra for buttering the pan

1 1/2 cups finely ground gingersnap crumbs (about 35 2-inch cookies)

2 large eggs

3/4 cup well-stirred unsweetened coconut milk

2/3 cup packed dark brown sugar

1 3/4 teaspoons ground cinnamon, divided

1 3/4 teaspoons vanilla extract, divided

1/2 teaspoon ground ginger

1/4 teaspoon table salt

6 ounces cream cheese, softened

3/4 cup confectioners' sugar

1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons toasted sweetened coconut flakes

## Preparation

Cut out a square of cheesecloth large enough to wrap around the puree with about a 4-inch border on all sides. Spoon the puree into the cheesecloth, tie the ends of the cheesecloth together to form a bag (like what we used to call a hobo sack) and thread a chopstick, skewer or dinner knife through the opening at the top. Place the chopstick over the top of a deep bowl and let the bag hang over the bowl. Chill for at least 8 hours or overnight. After the draining period, squeeze the cheesecloth gently to extract even more water, discard all the liquid at the bottom of the bowl and set the puree aside.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Butter a 9-by-9-by-2-inch baking pan. Melt 11/2 tablespoons of the butter. In a medium bowl, stir together the gingersnap crumbs and the melted butter and pat the crumbs evenly into the bottom of the pan. Bake on the middle shelf of the oven until the crumbs begin to darken, 6 to 8 minutes. Remove from the oven.

Meanwhile, in the same bowl you mixed the crumb mixture,

whisk the eggs until they are beaten lightly, add the coconut milk, brown sugar, 1 teaspoon of the cinnamon, 1 teaspoon of the vanilla, ginger and salt, and whisk until smooth. Stir in the drained pumpkin puree and spread evenly over the crumbs.

Bake on the middle shelf of the oven, until the center has set, about 25 minutes. Remove and let cool completely on a rack. In a medium bowl combine the cream cheese, the remaining 4 1/2 tablespoons butter, confectioners' sugar, remaining 3/4 teaspoon cinnamon and 3/4 teaspoon vanilla; beat until very smooth. Spread the mixture evenly over the top of the cooled pumpkin filling and sprinkle the coconut on top of the cream cheese frosting, pressing it down lightly. Chill until firm, about 2 hours. Cut into 36 squares and serve.