

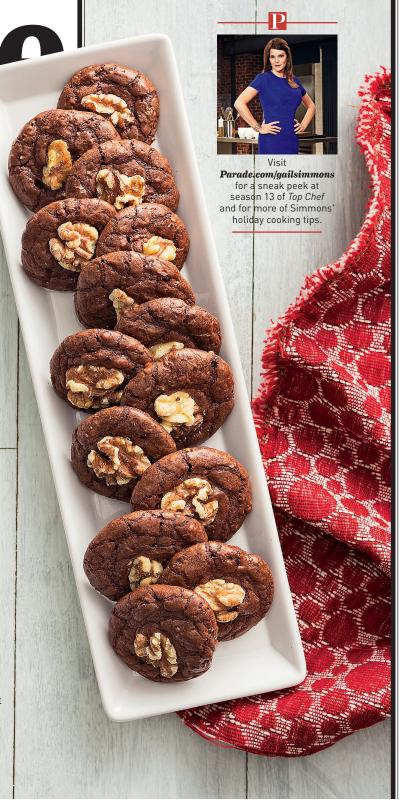
Gail Simmons' Sweet Holiday TREATS

"I love giving a gift that has a story," says Gail Simmons, judge on the Emmy Award-winning series Top Chef. (Season 13 premiered last week and airs Thursday nights on Bravo.) These gluten-free cookies are a delicious example. "They were a recipe passed down to me by my mother's best friend, my aunt Sue, who is my guru when it comes to baking," she says. "They come from someone whom I admire so much from my childhood, and that's what makes a gift like that so special."

Made with a generous amount of melted dark chocolate (the dark stuff with 70 percent or more cacao is the healthiest) for a rich batter, these cookies are crispy on the outside with a chewy, fudgy center. But take care, says Simmons, "they're addictive!" —Alison Ashton

Chewy Dark Chocolate Meringue Cookies

- 4 egg whites
- ▶ 1/2 tsp lemon juice
- ► 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- ► Pinch of salt
- ▶ ¾ cup sugar
- ▶ 12 oz 70–72 percent cacao dark chocolate, melted and cooled
- № 1/2 cup chopped walnuts, plus walnut halves for garnish
- ½ cup chopped dried cherries or cranberries
- 1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.
- Using a hand mixer or stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, beat egg whites, lemon juice, vanilla and salt until foamy. Gradually add sugar, beating until stiff peaks form. Fold in chocolate, walnuts and cherries.
- 3. Scrape half of batter into a large zip-top plastic bag. Cut a ¾-inch hole in one corner of bag. Pipe 2-inch cookies onto prepared cookie sheets. Repeat with remaining batter and a clean zip-top bag. Top each cookie with a walnut half. Bake 15 minutes or until outside is set and dry. Cool completely on sheet pans. Store in an airtight container for up to a week. Makes 36.



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