

RICE KRISPIES SING THE BLUES

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(Excerpted from *Tastes Like God*)

Soulful and sweet, sultry and complex. Chewy and gooey, and very grown up. If Rice Krispy Treats and Billie Holiday got married and had a baby, this would be it. (God bless the child.)

½ cup dried cherries or cranberries

Balsamic vinegar

Kahlua

6 cups Rice Krispies (or similar crisped rice cereal)

3 tablespoons salted butter

1 10 oz. package regular marshmallows (or 4 cups of mini marshmallows)

4 tablespoons + 1 teaspoon cocoa powder

1 ½ tablespoons instant espresso powder*

¼ teaspoon sea salt

⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Good quality bar of dark chocolate, half of it chopped into smallish bits

Heat dried cranberries or dried cherries in microwave safe cup (like a glass measuring cup) sixty seconds with equal parts balsamic vinegar and Kahlua just to barely cover the fruit—it's okay if a few berries poke out slightly above the liquid. Set aside to cool and rehydrate.

Melt butter in a large saucepan over low heat. Add marshmallows and stir until completely melted. To the melted butter/marshmallow mixture (before Rice Krispies are added), add cocoa powder, instant espresso powder, sea salt and freshly ground pepper. Stir until thoroughly blended. Drain the rehydrated berries/cherries, discarding any unabsorbed liquid. Add berries/cherries to the marshmallow mixture. Stir. Add Rice Krispies, stir to coat well.

Using a buttered spatula, shovel the mixture into a buttered 13 x 9 pan and press down to compact it into a thick, even layer. Dot the top evenly with dark chocolate bits. Press chocolate bits to embed them. Slice into hunks and enjoy!

NOTES: Don't be put off by the vinegar in the recipe. When paired with large amounts of sugar and butter, balsamic vinegar does not taste vinegary at all. It merely cuts the sweet by adding a pleasingly mysterious, slightly tangy caramel bass note. Having said that, don't waste the good stuff—if you have nice balsamic vinegar in your pantry, save it for some other recipe. The cheap kind works just fine here.

*Make sure to use instant espresso (or coffee) powder, not actual espresso powder. That would be weird, dumping ground coffee into your food.

Consider this recipe an invitation to play. I've set down a reliable foundation for you; if followed to the letter, it should produce a delicious outcome, exactly as it is. But if the mood strikes you, go for a little bit of jazz improv instead. Add some new harmonies all around that melody.

Substitute Bailey's or Grand Marnier, or maybe Amaretto for the Kahlua. Try tart, syrupy pomegranate molasses instead of balsamic vinegar. Walnuts, toasted almonds or candied orange peel instead of berries. Smoky chipotle chili powder in place of black pepper. Mess around with measurements, too, if you like. Why not? Have fun with it—Billie would want you to.