

nanaimo bars

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Nanaimo Bars

Three no-bake layers: a coconut-graham-nut base bound with cooked egg and chocolate, a custard-powder buttercream in the middle, and a chocolate top. Named for the city on Vancouver Island, first printed in local cookbooks in the 1950s, and declared Canada's national dessert by a national newspaper poll that nobody has since disputed.

Nothing here is baked at all, which makes it a good companion to [no-bake desserts](#).

What makes it work

- **The base is cooked, briefly, over a double boiler.** Egg and butter are heated with cocoa until the mixture thickens; that is what sets the crumb base into something sliceable instead of loose.
- **Custard powder in the middle layer is not optional to the identity.** It is what makes the filling yellow, faintly vanilla, and slightly starchy — the thing that distinguishes a Nanaimo bar from any other chocolate slice.
- **Score the top layer before it sets hard.** Chocolate set solid over a soft filling shatters when you cut it. Wait 10 minutes, score portion lines, then chill.
- **Add a spoonful of oil to the top chocolate.** It keeps the layer just soft enough to cut cleanly and stops it cracking away from the filling.

Ingredients

Makes 16 bars in a 20 cm square tin.

Base:

- 115 g unsalted butter
- 50 g granulated sugar
- 40 g cocoa powder — see [Cocoa and cocoa mixes](#)
- 1 [egg](#), beaten
- 200 g graham or [digestive biscuits](#) crumbs
- 100 g desiccated [coconut](#)
- 60 g [walnuts](#) or almonds, chopped

Middle:

- 115 g unsalted butter, softened
- 3 tbsp [milk](#)
- 2 tbsp custard powder
- 250 g powdered sugar

Top:

- 200 g dark chocolate — see [Chocolates](#)
- 2 tbsp neutral oil or 30 g butter

Method

Line the tin with parchment, overhanging on two sides.

Melt the butter, sugar and cocoa in a bowl over simmering water. Whisk in the beaten egg and keep whisking for two to three minutes until it thickens to a custard. Off the heat, stir in the crumbs, coconut and nuts. Press firmly and evenly into the tin. Chill 30 minutes.

Beat the butter, milk, custard powder and powdered sugar until light and spreadable. Spread over the base and chill another 30 minutes until firm.

Melt the chocolate with the oil, pour over, and tilt to level. Wait 10 minutes, score the portions, then chill until set.

Notes

- **Cut with a hot dry knife**, wiped between cuts, and take the tin out of the fridge 15 minutes first.
- Mint, peanut butter, mocha and maple are the standard variations, all made in the middle layer.
- **Keeps two weeks refrigerated** and freezes for three months, cut.

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