



Chocolate Cherry Cheesecake Bars

Chocolate and cherries are a classic flavor combination, and this creamy no-bake dessert does not disappoint. Perfect for holiday gatherings and using easy to find ingredients, these bars will become a family favorite.

Yield: 16 servings; 1 square per serving

Ingredients:

- 8 graham cracker sheets
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 4 cups unthawed frozen cherries
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar, divided
- 1 (4-ounce) bar 70% dark chocolate
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup half and half
- 2 (8-ounce) packages $\frac{1}{3}$ less fat cream cheese, softened
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line an 8-inch-square baking pan with parchment paper, leaving a 2-inch overhang on all sides.
2. Place graham crackers in a large freezer bag and crush with a rolling pin or a bottle until fine crumbs form. Add ground graham crumbs to a bowl and drizzle with 4 tablespoons melted butter; mix with a spatula or spoons until the crumbs are coated in butter. Transfer to the prepared pan, pressing the mixture firmly and evenly into the bottom of the pan. Bake until lightly browned around the edges, about 10 minutes. Let cool in the pan on a wire rack for at least 10 minutes.
3. While the crust bakes, combine frozen cherries and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar in a medium saucepan; cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the cherries begin to soften, about 5 minutes. Continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until the syrup thickens to a jam like consistency, 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer the cherry mixture to a blender; Blend until a semi-chunky puree forms. Transfer to a medium bowl and refrigerate, uncovered, to cool completely, about 20 minutes.
4. While the cherries cool, break chocolate bar into small pieces and place in a medium heatproof bowl. Microwave $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cream in a microwave-safe measuring cup on High until hot, about 1 minute. Pour the hot cream over the chocolate pieces; let stand for 2 minutes. Whisk until the mixture is smooth and the chocolate is fully melted, about 1 minute. Let cool to room temperature, about 10 minutes.
5. Combine softened cream cheese, 1 teaspoon vanilla, and the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar in a medium bowl; mix with a hand mixer until smooth. Add the cooled chocolate mixture; mix until fully incorporated, smooth and fluffy, stopping to scrape down sides as needed.
6. Spread the cooled cherry mixture evenly on top of the cooled crust; top with the chocolate mixture, spreading into an even layer. Cover and refrigerate until set, at least 4 hours and up to 24 hours. Cut into 16 squares and serve chilled.

Nutrition info per serving:

Calories: 253, Saturated Fat: 6g, Sodium: 220mg, Added Sugars: 11.6g, Fiber: 2.3g, Protein: 4.2g

Adapted from: <https://www.eatingwell.com/chocolate-cherry-cheesecake-bars-11753425>