

BROWNIES
to die for!



Cut a brownie into a unique shape, plate it with a cream sauce, decorate it with an edible flower, and transform a comfort-food dessert from yum to wow, in this delicious Glazed Brownie Triangle.

BROWNIES to die for!

BEV SHAFFER



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Special thanks to all my taste testers who contributed their waistlines to this book.

Thanks to my friend, Vickie, for her proofreading skills and ever-so-tactful explanations of what she liked and didn't like about my writing style.

Thanks to my husband, dear friend, and unwavering supporter, John . . . for baking brownies when I simply didn't have the time (hey, somebody's got to do it!); for reading and reworking recipes with me; for taking the mouth-watering photographs you see in this cookbook that simply say "bake me"; for egging me on a long, long time ago by saying, "don't be discouraged if the answer is no"; and, most of all, just for being himself!

I'd also like to dedicate this book to the National Hockey League. As a longtime fan (as in fanatical), I was desperate for a hockey game during their strike and went to an American Hockey League game. I broke my finger on my right hand at the game—and (being right handed, of course) typed, edited, and retyped this entire manuscript with the finger splinted, two surgeries, three pins, and much agony. Just one season of no hockey, and see what an out-of-practice hockey fan has to go through?!

And, yes, Ray—there are still some Chocolate-Ganache-Topped Brownies left in the freezer . . . I think!

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A helping hand and a Chocolate-Ganache-Topped Brownie are welcome additions to any kitchen!

BROWNIE BITES

I remember my first taste of a brownie as though it were yesterday. A grade-school friend's mom was of Swiss descent, and my friend invited me into her kitchen one day to taste this chocolaty, cakelike concoction that her mom called a "brownie square." It was heavenly . . . moist, dense, and—oh! that flavor of chocolate was sublime! I rushed home to tell my mom about it, hoping that she'd dedicate every waking minute to the pursuit of baking me the perfect "brownie square." "Chocolate is not something I bake with, but I'd be happy to make you some nut roll," my mom countered, not even looking up from making her stuffed cabbage.

I was crushed!—but determined to use my childish ways to convince my mom that somewhere in her Hungarian ancestry her relatives, too, had made "brownie squares" and the recipe had simply been lost. Many nut rolls later, I filed the taste of those "brownie squares" in the back of my mind. . . .

Since then, I've become a brownie snob. It's not necessarily something I talk about in public. Lots of people are perfectly satisfied with wasting their calories on something they can concoct out of a box mix (add egg, water, oil, and—like magic!—brownies!). Not me. I want deep, dense, chocolate brownies . . . slightly underbaked so they melt on the tongue, and you can close your eyes when you eat them. The kind of brownies that I can add toasted walnuts or pecans to, chunks of semisweet chocolate to . . . and once they're baked and I take a bite, they're crunchy with just a hint of cake that enrobes the nuts and chocolate pieces.

I've devoted hours and hours of baking and playing-in-the-kitchen time to creating and perfecting this assortment of brownie recipes. They're my creations (or those of friends—chefs, bakers, culinary students), all with my fine-tuning and reworking. I've taught them in cooking classes, written about them in food columns, demonstrated them on television, and moaned over them on radio. I even have the thighs to prove it!

If I ever wound up in court I'd have my lawyer tell the judge, "Your honor, this woman wants only the basics—shelter, clothing, transportation, and the ability to buy the very best chocolate whenever the [need] urge strikes her" (which would be often!).

If I was sitting across from someone at a restaurant, and they were pouring their heart out to me but hadn't touched their extravagant brownie dessert, I'd be distracted! "Oh that's terrible," I'd say. "Are you going to finish your dessert?"

I know this all sounds beyond reason, but it's true. I love brownies. The

ingredients need to be basic and the very best—unsalted butter, unbleached all-purpose flour, toasted nuts. I add a layer of this and a topping of that and use chocolate with the highest cocoa-butter content and the least amount of sweetness. Then I can bake them, cut them, savor them, and say, “*Wow!*”

Research tells us that twelve out of every ten people love chocolate. Based on this statistic, brownies are the perfect dessert to lure anyone into an agreeable trance any day. Brownies are sexy, not stuffy. They’re complex in flavor and texture but not complicated to make and bake.

Chocolate varieties abound, so I’ve included in my “Chocolate Info” chapter a little Chocolate 101, complete with chocolate melting tips, to get you started if you’re not (yet) a passionate baker. I love the better-quality chocolates that are generous in cocoa butter and provide the richest mouth feel. (My favorites are: Callebaut, from Belgium, for everything from unsweetened to bitter- or semisweet, milk, and white chocolate; Valrhona, from France, for bittersweet or milk, but I especially love their white chocolate and their unsweetened cocoa powder; Scharffen Berger, from California, for their unsweetened, semisweet, and bittersweet chocolate. For chocolate chips, I prefer either Guittard, Callebaut, or Ghirardelli. Any of these makes a superb brownie.) But I’m always trying the newest artisan chocolate on the market—varieties and labels abound. This is the perfect excuse to buy various types of chocolate and taste for quality and degrees of sweetness (or lack thereof)!

So let’s not delay the choc-euphoria any longer. Heat the oven, and get out the mixing bowls and whisk. Ready, set, bake—it’s brownie time!

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