



## Across the Fence Holiday Recipes – December 2025

### Apple Caramel Cheesecake

#### **Crust:**

8 whole graham crackers  
1 cup walnuts, divided  
2 Tbsp. light brown sugar  
5 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted

2 tsp. vanilla extract

½ tsp. salt

½ cup heavy cream

#### **Filling:**

½ cup plus 2 Tbsp. sugar, divided  
1 Tbsp. orange zest  
3 pkgs. (8 oz. each) cream cheese, at room temperature  
½ cup plus 2 Tbsp. brown sugar  
4 large eggs, at room temperature

#### **Apple topping:**

2 cups apple cider

¼ cup sugar

1 Tbsp. cold butter

2 tsp. vanilla extract

3 Granny Smith apples - peeled, seeded and thinly sliced

3 Fuji apples - peeled, seeded and thinly sliced

¼ cup apple brandy or whisky (optional)

**Make the crust:** Preheat the oven to 350°F. Place the graham crackers, ½ cup of the walnuts, and brown sugar in a food processor; process until finely ground. With the motor running, add the butter through the feed tube; process until the mixture just comes together. Spray the bottom and side of a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray. Pat the mixture evenly into the bottom of the prepared pan. Place on a baking sheet. Bake until lightly golden brown and just set, about 8 minutes. Remove pan to a baking rack and let cool completely. **Make the filling:** Combine ¼ cup of sugar and the orange zest in a food processor; process until combined. Place the cream cheese in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment and beat until light and fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the orange sugar, remaining sugar, and light brown sugar, and beat again until the sugar is incorporated and the mixture is light and fluffy. Add the eggs, 1 at a time and mix until just incorporated, scraping the sides and bottom of the bowl. Add vanilla extract and beat until combined. Add the salt and heavy cream, and mix until just combined. Scrape the mixture into the prepared pan. Set the cheesecake pan on a large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil and fold up the sides around it. Place the cake pan in a large roasting pan. Pour hot tap water into the roasting pan until the water is about halfway up the sides of the cheesecake pan; the foil will keep the water from seeping into the cheesecake. Bake until the sides of the cake are slightly puffed and set and the center still jiggles, about 55 minutes. Turn the heat off. Open the oven door and close it again, and allow the cake to cook in the water bath for 1 hour. Remove the cake to a baking rack and allow to cool to room temperature for 2 hours. Cover the cake and refrigerate for at least 4 hours and up to 24 hours until chilled through. **Make the apple topping:** Bring apple cider, sugar, and vanilla to a boil in a large sauté pan over high heat. Cook until slightly thickened and reduced to ½ cup. Stir in the butter until melted. Add the apples and cook, stirring occasionally, until lightly caramelized and soft. Add the (optional) apple brandy and cook until reduced by 1/2. Transfer the apples to a plate and let cool slightly. Top cheesecake with the warm apple topping, drizzle liberally with caramel sauce and sprinkle with the remaining toasted walnuts.

## **Christmas Tree Cupcakes**

1 box cake mix  
1 cup water  
¼ cup vegetable oil  
3 eggs  
1 container vanilla frosting

Sanding sugar for sprinkling  
8 to 9 dipping pretzel sticks  
1 bag (12 oz.) green candy melts  
Non-pareil rainbow sprinkles

Heat oven to 350°F. Grease a large muffin tray. Mix cake mix, water, oil, and eggs in large bowl with mixer on medium speed, or beat vigorously by hand 2 minutes. Divide batter evenly between muffin tins. Bake as directed on chart or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes before removing from pan. Cool completely before frosting. Transfer frosting to a bowl and whip it with a hand mixer until fluffy. Transfer to a piping bag and pipe over cupcakes. Sprinkle cupcakes with sanding sugar.

**For the trees:** Arrange pretzel sticks on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Microwave ½ bag green candy melts in 30-second intervals until melted. Transfer to a piping bag; pipe a zigzag tree shape generously on top of each pretzel stick, leaving the bottom half of the pretzel exposed. Sprinkle with rainbow sprinkles and let set for 10 minutes or until completely cool and hardened. Make a few extra trees in case some break. Place trees on frosted cupcakes.

## **Stained Glass Cookies**

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature  
1 cup sugar  
2 large eggs

1 tsp. vanilla extract  
3 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting  
1 bag assorted brightly colored hard candies

Cream the butter and sugar in a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment on medium-high speed until smooth, about 2 minutes. Reduce the speed to low and add the eggs 1 at a time, mixing after each addition until fully incorporated. Add the vanilla and then slowly mix in the flour until well combined. Remove the dough, press into a flat rectangle, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour (or overnight). Position oven racks in the top and bottom thirds of the oven and pre-heat to 350°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment. Cut the dough into thirds, wrap 1 piece back in the plastic wrap, and return it to the refrigerator. Dust the work surface and the remaining 2 pieces of dough well with flour. Roll each piece of dough to 3/16-inch thickness with a rolling pin, moving the dough and dusting the top and bottom with additional flour if it becomes sticky. Cut out as many large shapes as possible with a 4-inch star cookie cutter and place on the prepared baking sheets. Gather the scraps and reroll once to cut out more cookies. Cut a small shape out of the middle of each large star with a 2-inch star cookie cutter and reserve for another use. (You can chill and bake the small stars separately or freeze for later.) Refrigerate the baking sheets until the dough is firm, 15 to 20 minutes. Meanwhile, separate the candy by color and place each color in a separate resealable plastic bag. Place a kitchen towel over the bags and crush the candy into small pieces using a rolling pin or meat mallet; do not pulverize. Fill the cut-out areas of the cookies two thirds full with the crushed candy. Bake the cookies, rotating the baking sheets from top to bottom and front to back halfway through, until light golden brown and the candy has melted, 12 to 15 minutes. Cool on the baking sheets for 5 minutes before transferring to wire racks to cool completely. Repeat the rolling, cutting, filling, and baking process with the remaining piece of dough.