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Today's granola: clever, crunchy, gluten-free

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In a time when healthy and whole-grain is in our eating lexicon, there's a reason granola is making a comeback. The original bland concoction of oats and grains from 40 years ago has taken on a new persona and it's not just viewed as healthy hippie food anymore -- now it's considered gourmet (and, yes, even gluten-free).



In fact, the cereal comprised of what once tasted like sweetened drywall smattered with a sprinkling of rock-hard raisins has been transformed into more artisan brands than you shake a stalk of oats at. Gourmet ingredients -- from coffee beans to cacao nibs, and green tea to ginger, and even black pepper -- are starring along with artisan wildflower honey, toasted hazelnuts and macadamias, sea salt and a wide variety of exotic dried fruits.

And granola's not just for breakfast anymore. In addition to being a healthy and tasty morning treat, it's a delicious snack and great topping for yogurt or fresh fruit -- and even makes you feel less guilty about an ice cream indulgence.

Metro Detroit has more than its share of home-grown granola, Michaelene's, Jessica's and **Randy's**, and each brand is unique.

At **Randy's Granola** in Detroit, co-founder and CEO Suzanne Vier makes three varieties of hand-crafted granola: Original, Lotsa Chocolate and new this month, So Very Cherry.

Vier, who returned to Michigan after living in New York, boasts that the original granola, a recipe adapted from her Grand Valley State college friend, Randy TenBrink, uses only eight ingredients. Most are from Michigan including the brown sugar, maple syrup, cherries from Traverse City, peanuts from Rocky Peanut and spices from Eastern Market.

Randy's uses certified gluten-free oats for celiac sufferers, and the granola is baked in small batches and hand-toasted.

"I wanted to take granola beyond the cereal aspect," Vier says. "I like the idea of sweet and savory, so the addition of black pepper really makes the flavor pop." **Randy's** also adds peanuts to the mix, which ups the protein ante.

"You can use our granola for a bar snack or in the best chocolate chip cookie you've ever had," says Vier who also likes to put granola atop fresh fruit and salads and even sprinkled in a fall pumpkin soup.

Now, granola has become so popular that upscale restaurants and hotels are offering it on their menus.

At Mudgie's Deli in Corktown, owner Greg Mudge offers **Randy's Granola** served atop Calder's Dairy yogurt and fresh strawberries on his new Sunday brunch menu, and he says it's becoming quite popular. Mudgie's also offers the snack-size packages of **Randy's** as a healthy alternative to potato chips.

Vier says she's working with two restaurants, Roast in Detroit and Ocean Prime in Troy, to create a signature granola cocktail. "We know that granola is healthy and tasty, but I want to take it beyond a breakfast food," she says.



Randy's Granola Lotsa Chocolate Triple Chocolate Chip Cookies

Recipe from Randy's Granola in Detroit. Look for **Randy's Granola** in gourmet markets or visit www.randysgranola.com.

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons of cocoa powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 stick (1/2 cup) unsalted butter, softened
- 1/3 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup Randy's Lotsa Chocolate Granola (or use regular granola and increase chocolate chips to 1 cup)
- 3/4 cup semisweet chocolate chips (4 1/2 ounces)



Put oven racks in upper and lower thirds of oven. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Whisk together flour, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt in a small bowl. Beat together butter, sugars and vanilla in a medium bowl with an electric mixer at high speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes, then beat in egg until combined well. Reduce speed to low, then add flour mixture and mix until just combined. Stir in granola and chocolate chips.

Drop 18 mounds (about 2 level tablespoons per mound) of batter about 2 inches apart onto 2 ungreased large baking sheets, then pat each mound into a 2 1/2 -inch round.

Bake cookies, switching position of sheets halfway through baking, until pale golden, about 14 minutes. Cool on sheets 1 minute, then transfer to racks to cool completely. Makes 18 large (4-inch) cookies.

Per serving: 172 calories; 9 g fat (5 g saturated fat; 47 percent calories from fat); 22 g carbohydrates; 26 mg cholesterol; 113 mg sodium; 2 g protein; 1 g fiber.

Makes about 12 cups, or 24 servings.

Per serving (per 1/2 cup): 316 calories; 18 g fat (3 g saturated fat; 51 percent calories from fat); 34g carbohydrates; 0 mg cholesterol; 95 mg sodium; 7 g protein; 4 g fiber.

Pear Granola Muffins

Recipe adapted from Bon Appetit. Substitute peaches and peach nectar for the pears and nectar if desired.

- 3/4 cup pear nectar
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon peel
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 cup all purpose flour
- 2/3 cup (packed) golden brown sugar
- 1/2 cup low-fat granola
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/4 cups finely chopped unpeeled pear (about 1 medium)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line 10 1/3 -cup muffin cups with foil muffin papers. Whisk first 5 ingredients in large bowl to blend. Stir both flours and sugar in medium bowl until no sugar lumps remain. Mix in granola, baking powder, nutmeg and salt. Add pear; toss to coat. Stir flour mixture into egg mixture just to blend (batter will be thick). Divide among prepared muffin cups, mounding in center.

Bake muffins until golden brown and tester inserted into center comes out clean, about 20 minutes. Transfer muffins to rack and cool. Makes 10 muffins.

Per serving: 223 calories; 5 g fat (1 g saturated fat; 20 percent calories from fat); 42 g carbohydrates; 42 mg cholesterol; 263 mg sodium; 5 g protein; 3 g fiber.

Locally made granolas

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Other ideas using granola

- For a granola breakfast parfait, put 1 tablespoon granola in the bottom of a parfait glass. Next add 1 tablespoon low-fat plain or vanilla yogurt, and then a drizzle of honey. Repeat the layers and top with a sprinkle of granola and a fresh strawberry. If you assemble it the night before, all you need to add in the morning is a spoon.
- Use granola as a crumbled topping for your favorite fruit crisp.
- Fold granola into pancake or waffle batter or use for a topping.
- Sprinkle granola atop a pumpkin or squash soup.
- Use lightly sweetened granola in your holiday stuffing.
- Make a fresh fruit salad with granola topping.
- Add fresh strawberries to some fresh greens with a drizzle of raspberry vinaigrette and a sprinkle of granola.

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