

BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

Traveling with Jewish Taste

Peanut Butter

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



Back in the day, the only way to get peanut butter in Israel was to have friends or family bring it with them on visits – along with Levis and M&Ms. But peanuts themselves were certainly around, from the crunchy coated peanuts called *kabukim* to the ubiquitous Israeli snack food Bamba (think peanut flavored Cheetos).

Israel, in fact, cultivates peanuts. Due to the extended growing season, Israeli farmers last year harvested about 450,000 pounds of the goober, almost three-quarters of which were exported. And they grow both in the Negev, thriving in the sandy soil, and in the northern Hula Valley.

Reminiscent of the story in the Book of Ruth, peanut farmers play the role of a modern day Boaz, as well. Every year, in what has been called “the eighth wonder of the world,” more than 500 million migratory birds, representing 500 species, fly over Israel. While in the country, cranes in particular have had the bad habit of devouring crops growing in the Hula Valley. The Cranes Project, developed in response, involves letting the peanut crop’s leavings remain in the fields for the birds to glean. This strategy accomplishes two goals: it feeds the cranes while at the same time it prevents them destroying other crops growing nearby. Once the birds have eaten their fill, farmers can till the soil and plant new winter crops.

However, for all the love of the groundnut, one never saw it on an Ashkenazi menu at Passover, whether here in the U.S. or in Israel. That’s because peanuts are legumes, and way back in the 13th century the rabbis, using a mind-boggling rationale, determined that legumes, along with rice, corn, and a host of other foods called *kitniyot*, were forbidden (although I clearly remember peanut oil in my mother’s kitchen — yet another one of those head-spinning factoids of the kosher life).

Flash forward to 1989, when the Conservative movement in the U.S. followed its Israeli counterpart in accepting a responsum written by Rabbi David Golinkin. The Law Committee ruled that *kitniyot* — that includes peanuts! — are now considered kosher for Passover. Score one for the concept of one people.

At a recent family event, I actually met Rabbi Golinkin and thanked him from the bottom of my heart. Wryly, he said something to the effect that, of all the responsa he has written over the decades, the *kitniyot* one is probably the one for which he will be remembered.

And then we learned of the amazing news from Start-up Nation: Peanut allergy is almost nonexistent in Israel. A study published in the prestigious *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* reported that, compared to a control group of Jewish children in the UK, Israeli kids showed ten times less incidence of peanut allergy. The authors attribute the finding to the fact that Israeli kids begin munching on Bamba in infancy. So, defying odds as Israelis are wont to do, parents in the Holy Land have been doing the exact opposite of everything being touted in the States to avoid the deadly anaphylactic shock that the legumes can cause here.

Always with its finger on the pulse of American parenthood, Trader Joe’s is now selling Bamba.

Carol Goodman Kaufman is a psychologist and author with a passion for travel and food. She is currently at work on a food history/cookbook, tracing the paths that some of our favorite foods have taken from their origins to appear on dinner plates and in cultural rites and artifacts around the world. She invites readers to read her blog at carolgoodmankaufman.com and to follow her on Twitter @goodmankaufman.

Peanut Butter Chocolate Brownies



Ingredients:

- 1/2 c. peanut butter
- 5 1/2 T. butter, softened
- 2/3 c. white sugar
- 1/2 c. packed brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 1 c. all-purpose flour
- 1 t. baking powder
- 1/4 t. salt
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips

Directions:

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Grease a 9x9 inch baking pan.
- In a medium bowl, cream together peanut butter and butter.
- Gradually blend in the brown sugar, white sugar, eggs, and vanilla. Mix until fluffy. Combine flour, baking powder, and salt.
- Stir into the peanut butter mixture until well blended.
- Spread into pan.
- Sprinkle chocolate chips over top.
- Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until the top springs back when touched.
- Cool, and cut into 16 squares.

MAZEL TOV

Mazel Tov to...

Burt and Ellen Downes on the engagement of their son **Will** to **Amy Mandel**.

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Bob Markowitz on his 95th birthday.

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Paul and Ellen Silverstein on making the move from the Berkshires to their new home in New York City.

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Paul Green on the release of his second klezmer/jazz fusion album with his band Two Worlds, *A Bissel Rhythm*.

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Barbara and Jesse Waldinger on their 50th wedding anniversary.

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Barbara Chasen and Rafael Rubenstein on their 10th wedding anniversary.

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Nancy Lipoff and Hope Silverstein on being honored with the Kipnis-Wilson/Friedland (KWF) Award at the International Lion of Judah Conference in December (please see story on page 1)

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Seth Rogovoy on producing a start-studded evening of Yiddish music and culture, “From Shtetl to Stage,” at the Stern Auditorium of Carnegie Hall on April 15.

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Carole Siegel on her special birthday.

As my parents planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who come after me. – Talmud

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