



SISTER MARY CLASSIC PRALINES

Legend tells us that pralines were named after Cesar du Plessis Praslin, a grand marshal of pre-Napoleonic France. It is said Praslin's cook, Clément Lassagne, coated his master's almonds with sugar to prevent indigestion.

The crown jewel of New Orleans' confections, there are as many praline recipes as there are bread pudding recipes. Everyone has a favorite. Sister Mary's pralines are fragile, sugary, and melt-in-your-mouth light. Her version of the recipe has been passed down through generations of nuns. Sister Mary's candies could be appropriately pronounced pray-leens, but we say praw-leens, otherwise, us locals will know you're not from around here.

YIELD: 5 DOZEN

1-pound	light brown sugar, box	pinch	salt
2-1/2 cups	granulated sugar	1/2 stick	margarine (2 ounces)
2-1/2 cups	whole milk	1 teaspoon	vanilla extract
2-1/2 cups	pecans, chopped (medium-sized)		(or maple if desired)

Combine light brown sugar, granulated sugar, milk, and salt in the pot. Cook on medium heat until the thermometer reaches 240°F, the soft-ball stage. Stir frequently to avoid sticking and burning. If the mixture sticks, scorches or burns, you must start over. To test, remove the pot from heat so it does not scorch and drop a small amount of mixture into cold water. The candy will form a soft, loose ball. If the soft ball stage has not been reached, return the pot to heat. Once the mixture has reached the proper soft-ball stage, remove from the heat and add the pecans, margarine, and pure vanilla or maple extract. Allow the candy to stand for 10 minutes without stirring.

Stir the mixture until the consistency is right for spooning (50 to 100 strokes). Spoon the pralines in a tablespoon size onto a marble slab or a sheet of waxed paper. Allow them to cool and dry. Lift each praline carefully using a spatula and turn it over to dry both sides.

Store in a tightly covered container or wrap individually.

NOTE: Sister Mary suggests using a cast-iron pot for the best results. This holds true for many recipes. Good cooks treasure cast-iron pots that have been passed down for generations. They can be found at garage sales, flea markets, second-hand shops or new at kitchen supply stores. The preferred brands seem to be Griswold or Lodge. New or rusted iron pots must be well scoured before use. Dry the pot thoroughly in a warm oven. Cool, then season it by wiping the pot liberally inside and out with vegetable oil. Heat slowly in the oven at 250°F for three hours. Once seasoned, clean the pot by wiping it out with a paper towel. Never immerse in water, or it must be re-seasoned.

CAUTION: Boiling sugar sticks to the skin and is extremely painful. Please take care.



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As early settlers of New Orleans in the 1700s nuns contributed mightily to the city's heritage and spiritual well-being.

They have provided cookery, medical care, gardening, education, and other charitable and religious services to the community. Nuns are credited with bringing the recipe for almond praline candy to New Orleans from France. Once here, they substituted the readily available pecans.

Today in an cloistered uptown convent surrounded by high brick walls and magnificent oak trees. The Poor Clare nuns share quiet, contemplative lives dedicated to poverty and prayer. Sister Mary makes and sells pralines as her part in sustaining the order. Visitors simply ring the convent bell. Sometimes the candies are available; at other times, they are not.

This recipe is Sister Mary's version, passed on to her from other members of the order.