



*In 2012, I was a part of the original writing team for the now offline food and culture site, The Snackpot. This document contains all snack reviews written for the site. The Snackpot's mission was "to raise snacks to the highest echelons of pop culture" by way of intelligent and witty writing with "just the right dose of snark." The site aimed to be accessible to readers of a variety of backgrounds, but the predicted primary readership was "college educated and urban with a robust pop culture lexicon."*

### **Anna's Almond Thins**

The Swedes have given us many things. Obviously, ABBA and IKEA. Slightly less obviously, the three-point seatbelt and the blowtorch. Most important to us, however, are Anna's Almond Thins cookies. Anna Karlsson opened her original bakery in Stockholm in 1929, and the company has followed her all natural recipes ever since. Anna's opened its Alberta, Canada bakery in 2002 (happy 10<sup>th</sup> birthday!) for full-on North American dominance. Flower shaped and 2.5 inches in diameter, Anna's Thins follow in the tradition of Swedish wish cookies: hold one in the palm of your hand and tap it with your index finger. Dreams come true with a three-piece break. Even if your cookie fails you, each piece will warm your soul. The cookies' scent takes on a hint of molasses and gorgeous meandering days. Their delicate crispness soon dissolves into rich creamy nuttiness. No teeth required. The spices hint at Anna's original ginger cookies, but the almonds (2% of the recipe) march forth to be recognized and to bestow a buzz which rivals their alcoholic amaretto counterpart. These cookies are partially sweetened with something called *invert sugar syrup*, an ingredient similar to yet different from high fructose corn syrup and natural sugar found in honey—for an in-depth analysis, [A Life Less Sweet](#). Anna's Almond Thins offer a clever alternative to chocolate and fruit based sweets, whether for entertaining, or for quiet solo moments leaning against your kitchen counter wishing you were drifting down a Swedish river with Alexander Skarsgard or Victoria Silvstedt. They also reveal themselves as a

lovely compliment to your ironic-or-not tea time—in fact the cookies’ sleek packaging, complete with cellophane peek-a-boo window, fits tidily with your pantry’s tea boxes. Anna’s Thins are a flavorful base for pie crusts, and the secret ingredient to this amazing butternut squash lasagna recipe we have. Make a wish on other Thins flavors: Ginger, Orange, and Chocolate Mint. Visit [Annas.se](http://Annas.se) for more.

### **Aussie Bites (Costco)**

Get thee to a Costco! Right now. *Ignore* the shiny new Google TVs, hearing test booths, and magnum bottles of bourbon. *Run* to Baked Goods and grab a box of Traditional AUSSIE BITES with Omega-3. Do *not* run over to Books looking for the *Aussie Bites* kids book series (oh, you’ve never heard of it before either? Never mind.) Okay, you may’ve had to wrestle a rabid AB addict to obtain your 30 ounce package of rolled oats bliss, but you’re still alive—awesome. Now, slide your finger to tear through the “No trans fat” label. Crack open the PETE 1 thermoformed plastic container and hear its crinkling caco—no—*symphony*. All of a sudden it smells like Christmas (or whatever, you know what we mean) all year round! Take your first bite—there you go!

You’ll find the initial contact a bit dry—but once you unleash the honey and residual juices from the raisins and dried apricots, the inside of your mouth will go from desert to oasis. Okay, that’s a stretch—after your 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> in a row, a glass of milk (ooh, or rum!) will be necessary. The unsalted butter and sugar bring out a classic baked good taste, which is complimented by the fruits and coconut. The coconut, flax and sunflower seeds add a texture that prevents the whole thing from turning into mushy oatmeal in your mouth; and the rolled oats embrace the rest of the ingredients like a post-war reunion or a Green Peacer in a forest. Please do not eat them all in the store. And remember to pay.

If you don’t have a Costco near you, you will not be completely denied (though don’t go looking at Sam’s Club—apparently they discontinued their version a few years ago. We smell drama.) And if you’re in Australia, don’t ask random strangers or kangaroos—apparently these cakes of amazement have nothing to do with said down under island nation. There are plenty of recipes across the web for DIY snack aficionados. If the seven grams of fat per bite or the two sticks of butter freak you out, there are versions that substitute olive oil and applesauce.

How many bites *does* it take to finish an Aussie Bite? In civilized society, we say three. But you may find yourself going at them like the dingo tearing into that poor baby.

### **Barnum’s Animals—Crackers (Nabisco)**

Kids friggin’ love animals and anything to do with them. To kids, animals are these fascinating other moving noise-making *things* that are not people or babies. Kids also like crunchy things they can put in their mouths. And they love holding onto objects that are theirs all theirs to cover with their goopy germs. While animal shaped biscuits had floated Stateside from Victorian England and been produced by independent local bakeries, bakery uniting Nabisco began

providing kids with the triple threat snack known as Barnum's Animals in 1902. Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century plus the circus makes sense: pesky electronic entertainments hadn't yet taken hold of our brain cells, and they provided an important source of live animal love. These snacks allow us to reacquaint ourselves with a much simpler (if pre-Penicillin) time.

The iconic kid friendly box made to look like a caged circus train car (remember when the wheels were perforated and could pop out for maximum choo-choo action?) was introduced in Christmas of 1902, its white string meant for hanging these treats upon the tree. How quaint. We're thinking less Christmas and more our own little lunch box, Daddy's brief case, or for some of us potential little gay boys a society accepted version of Mommy's purse. They could hold anything our imaginations could: doctor equipment, magic powers, or Scooby Snacks. We walked around carrying this tote thinking we were special, even if we weren't.

While the packaging conjures warm nostalgia (and hopefully nothing too traumatic), what about the crackers themselves? It's still fun to start with ceremoniously biting off the head of each fairly detailed and identifiable animal (representing 1 of 37 total beasts in the snack's history), though this makes us wonder what vegetarians feel about the whole process. Each specimen, while technically a cracker, also has a cookie vibe due to its soft- and sweetness. Moisture level is well balanced, though after a while a wash of milk is recommended (milk dunking for too long, however, makes them soggy in a skeezy kind of way). We're not sure what the "natural and artificial flavors" involve, but there's a slight spice to them, and they fit well within the graham cracker genus. Tasty and not too sweet, also good with a little peanut butter or Nutella.

We encourage you to proudly whip out a box at your next corporate team lunch or poker game and feel the reserved jealousy emanating from your peers. Or for private moments, you can pine away with them at home ala *The Glass Menagerie* desperately waiting for your Lady or Gentleman Caller.

## **Cadbury Crème Eggs**

While Streets & Sanitation clears dead leprechauns off our nation's roadways the morning after St. Patrick's Day, grocery professionals across our land are in overdrive to stock their stores with their full-powered Easter candy arsenal (even if it did start trickling in on February 15....) You know the repertoire: chocolate bunnies, jellybeans, Peeps, basket supplies, all those pagan non-Jesuy goodies. The crown jewel in all this is the shimmering sugary golden yolk of the original Cadbury Crème Egg (officially branded thus in 1971) in the form of a "poured *fondant*," a beaten sugar water substance (the internet is fun!)

The egg's red, green, yellow, and blue foil allows you to choose your method of unwrapping: a slow peel or a full speed disrobing. The Cadbury folks have actually studied this since their 1980's "How Do You Eat Yours?" campaign. We at The Snackpot take our time with our snacks. Since tapping it daintily with a silver spoon as it sits in a stemmed egg cup doesn't work, we prefer to bite the tip and slurp up the first bit of crème (sorry, there really is no real way to avoid sounding a little gross—and Cadbury seems to own it with their current "Release the Goo" campaign.) Before you do so, take a moment to inhale the chocolate before you. While you may

breathe in nostalgia, you'll also know that this indeed is *milk* chocolate. It *smells* creamy, and not just from the cr me below the surface. The “milk ingredients” and cocoa butter make it melt down your throat before you even bite. It also smells somehow very British.

You and your mates may debate which component is the star: the chocolate or the cr me (we bet you also have a similar Oreo debate....) You may be frightened of the cr me's mimicking real egg innards. You just might not be an icing kind of guy. Trust us when we say they complement each other oh so smoothly. There's a thick grittiness to the cr me which gives the chocolate some traction while coating it with a different *kind* of sweet, like wrapping dates with maple syrup coated bacon. The delightful chocolate takes it like a pro.

Note: these are not for the weak at tooth. Your sensitive incisors may scream with sucrose shock. Your lips will be sticky and your fingers chocolaty no matter how much you hang onto the foil. But isn't that what Easter is all about?

## **Clif Bar Energy Bar-Maple Nut**

The first ingredient listed on the label of a Clif Bar is testosterone. Kidding of course, but just looking at the clearly-marketed-to-men individual wrapper featuring a mountain climber against the silhouette of a perfectly blue sky before we even *open* the darn thing does inspire us to perform an assortment of ~~stupid~~ ~~manly~~ adventurous feats: repelling dangerously high cliff(f)s, jumping out of airplanes, flipping over a few 4x4 trucks, cow tipping. In reality, it inspires us to accomplish *whatever* we set out to do upon consuming our Clif Bar flavor of choice: hitting the pavement toward a new career, getting that novel written, being an awesome dad. Clif, you've sucked us in before we've even taken a bite. Damn you.

At first glance, the totally organic Maple Nut Bar looks a little *too* all natural: a glistening congealed rectangle of mush. But wait! That smell makes up for it: it's an October Monday morning before school, and you hover over your bowl of instant maple & brown sugar oatmeal trying to catch a little more *Tom & Jerry* while kicking your little brother underneath the table. You can do anything!

Finally a bite: the texture is surprisingly hardy and airy at the same time—it doesn't exercise your jaw as much as other, denser energy/protein bar brands do. The ClifPro® mixture of organic rice crisps and other ingredients coupled with the ClifCrunch® blend of organic oat fiber, chicory, flax seed, and more gives the feeling of a direct-from-the-stovetop, uber-healthy Rice Krispie treat. Moisturewise, this bar is perfectly balanced. Nutritionwise, these bars present a whopping 10 grams of protein, and just enough fiber (but not *too* much...).

Tastewise, the pecan pralines, organic maple syrup, and organic brown rice syrup (the actual first listed ingredient) live up to the initial aromas. This bar is sweet, but not wincingly so. The fact that the sugars are more earthy and not so processed add a serenity to the sweetness. For maple nerds (you know who you are!) it's like having a plate of oatmeal pancakes in your man bag. How rad is that?

We look forward to trying other flavors and sharing our thoughts with you. Actually, we're just looking forward to ingesting more ClifInspiration®.

## **Clif Bar Energy-Crunchy Peanut Butter**

Peanut butter is the stuff of life. Right? Unless you have a nut allergy, we suppose. Then it's quite the opposite. Sorry about that. Still, it's a pretty ubiquitous flavor found in snacks from all walks of life—from uber-processed and sugar packed to especially nutty and *au naturale*. Just as brilliant straight from the jar to feed your midday hunger (or nightly depression) as it is spread on—well, anything. Naturally, the makers of Clif Bar include a peanut butter option to their male targeted line-up. And of course it's crunchy. Men like peanut butter. And crunchy things. We previously reviewed their Maple Nut variety. Here, we tackle their peanut butter entry.

Taking in the aroma—so vital to taste—from a freshly torn open package is an important part of the journey. These bars are generously earthy, roasted on the edge of burnt. They smell almost grandfatherly, but in a good way—like breathing in the comforting itch of their sweaters. Ultimately very masculine: no surprise with Clif Bars.

Their ClifPro® and ClifCrunch® formulas of goodies give these bars a sturdy but not-too-dense texture. And this variety is loaded with organic peanut bits—like stars alighting a mushy brown sky—to give it a little more weight than our Maple Nut friend. Tastewise, they live up to their elder statesman status. Recall that debate you had with your grandfather over his freshly pressed peanut butter versus your jar of Jiff and see which side you land on now. They didn't have Jiff back on the farm, yo! While you'll taste the salt of the earth, your need for sweet will be satisfied with Clif's blend of organic brown rice & cane syrups and date paste (a staple for raw foodies, vegans, and other natural food lovers).

Clif's Crunchy Peanut Butter offering are solid on their own, but also pair well with alternate bites of banana (as this review is being written over breakfast) to make a non-messy PB-Banana sandwich for trekking through the wilderness, for tilling the fields, or for your everyday adventures in the urban jungle.

## **Costco Sunrise Energy Bars**

We previously commanded you to get yourself to a Costco for a package of Aussie Bites. While there, you may also want to pick up a package of Sunrise Energy Bars which will likely be stocked within an eyeball's role to the right. While the two snacks definitely have their similarities—rolled oats, dried fruit, whole grain, 100% naturalness, boasted omega-3s—these bars deserve some special attention, especially if it will help them escape the shadow of their trendier cousin.

The flat rectangular bar shape gives them an extra quality of something homemade, a feat which other, individually wrapped oat-oriented bars certainly cannot boast. One component is Sustagrain® Barley Flour, an intriguing ingredient you may not be familiar with. It's one of those fancy researched products (brought to us by ConAgra Mills via the University of Montana—go Grizzlies!) that's high-fiber and has scientific sounding things like beta-glucan. Developed as a healthy alternative to traditional flours for folks with diabetes and gluten related issues, well, bonus points for the Sunrise folks for thinking of everyone. These bars also contain tapioca syrup. Now you won't swish a bite of Sunrise around in your mouth and delightfully be all like, "Ah yes, pudding!" Just know that it's a healthier alternative to corn syrup. And between this and the Sustagrain® your body will be good to go.

All that's great, but what we love best about these bars is all the fruit! While Aussie Bites contain a foundation of raisins and dried apricots, the Sunrise Bars take it *upstairs* by adding cranberries and dried apples, rounding out the taste profile with these fruits' sweet-tartness. We're also fans of the nut combo of almonds, cashews, and walnuts. Paired with the flax and sunflower seeds, we think these nuts add to the harder, denser texture. Still a chewy factor, but think more cookie and less muffin. A little dry in texture at first, the fruits and sweeteners soon release their mouth and belly coating juices. Still, after the second, or third—or definitely fourth—a solid swig milk, coffee, or Chardonnay might be helpful.

This accessible A+ snack will appeal to you, your young students, your parents, and your butler. Enjoy!

### **“Dirty” Potato Chips: Sweet Potato Chips**

“Dirty” and its noun “dirt” conjure a variety of connotations. Pop culturally, we may think of Christina Aguilera sweating through her thong in a wrestling ring or of Mötley Crüe's brilliant autobiography which we dare you to read without showering afterward. We can think of both hot grown up sex, and adorable 5-year-olds running around a soccer field in the rain. 1-900 numbers and laundry detergent. Dirt is of the earth—it is the soil we live and walk upon every day regardless of how much concrete and obliterated native civilizations come between it and our feet. Snackwise, dirt is a well baked mud pie. It is the stuff God made so it don't hurt when you shove that dropped Twinkie or piece of grape Bubble Yum back into your mouth (and totally freak out your germaphobe grandmother). Dirt is where much of our foodstuffs directly come from—however much processing they go through before they have anything to do with you.

The folks at “Dirty” Potato Chips understand our natural communion with the stuff. That's why they don't wash any of it off their carefully selected spud specimens, making for an even less processed product. While dirt is not listed alongside the triumvirate of potatoes, peanut oil blend and sea salt, they are not hiding their, um, dirty little secret. Keeping the dirt, in fact, helps lock in the flavor, texture, and overall crunch. And in staying true to their all natural mission, they also boast No Artificial Anything, MSG, or Wheat Glutens.

Dirty's sweet potato chips join the eleven varieties of "regular" (and not even really related) potato chips allowing for the alternateens in us to be different while the company (probably) cashes in on the post-marshmallow casserole era of sweet potato trends. Which is fine by us. Cash in away! A freshly opened bag practically puffs out a cloud of dirt—or at least that's what the packaging trains our brains to experience. These chips are kettle style, giving them a healthy thickness and crunch—and more time to hang out in your mouth for full flavor, vitamin, and beta-carotene extraction. They might also be confused for bits of potpourri if one were not careful (though we trust we're all a smart lot here), their randomly curled burnt orange selves like so many peanut scented wood shavings. It's kind of cool. They taste like—well, sweet potatoes. Rooty. Nutty. Dirty! A disciplined amount of sea salt accentuates those flavors—and brings a land-and-sea circle of life kind of vibe. We found our sample in a snack shop at Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio before hiking the wooded trails toward the waterfall. These all natural snacks made for a happy companion in nature, though you yourself need not get dirty to enjoy them.

And also, from now on, we will celebrate associating sweet potatoes with Mötley Crüe.

### **General Mills/Fiber One Oats & Peanut Butter Chewy Bars**

Warning: this review goes there.

The Wikipedia page for *dietary fiber* is pretty gross. It has phrases like "fermented in the colon." But honestly, it's good to understand what these things can do for you. When faced with the gratuitous amount of choices in the granola bar aisle, you may as well go for something that's good for your insides in addition to getting you through to your next meal. We seriously do not want you falling down at your desk or during your bar shift.

Fiber One boasts that their bars pack in 35% daily value of fiber—as do many of their competitors and generics, so your choice could be a matter of taste, price, and brand loyalty. Did you know that the secret fibrous ingredient in a Fiber One Chewy Bar is *chicory root*? (Well, it's a secret if you've never bothered to look at the ingredients list.) Chicory isn't just for coffee anymore, friends. It has *inulin*, stuff that helps keep you regular. In fact, so regular, that there are comment boards across the internet with folks complaining about—and rejoicing at—their increased flatulence rate. And with a casual comparison to our local supermarket brand, we are now feeling their pain. Sorry, TMI, but you were warned.

Flavorwise, the Oat & Peanut Butter is not as sweet as the Oats & Caramel variety. And peanut butter is healthier since it has more protein, right? Still, this peanut butter comes in the forms of "chips" and "drizzle" and definitely has more correlation to candy than does the creamy goodness you finger out of a Jiff jar. At 9 grams of sugar—which comes from HFC's mellower cousin high *maltose* corn syrup—each bar will still balance the blood levels without sending you into shock. The oats are more in charge of the texture than the flavor. Bound together by their chewy force field, they are the muscle of this snack. They are the fillers and satisfiers of your hunger. Like a respectable Rice Krispie treat, you can feel and hear the crunch and crisp without

the threat of breaking your jaw or knocking out a tooth. Bless the inventor of chewy granola bars.

Overall, a tasty snack with benefits to have on hand. Though perhaps try one at home first to see how your system reacts.

## **General Mills/Betty Crocker Fruit Roll-Ups Fruit Flavored Snacks- Strawberry**

For those of us who were there when General Mills' Fruit Corners debuted these new [Holy Grails of lunchroom coolness](#) in 1983, we were snack pioneers. Unrolling a Fruit Roll-Up was much like opening an ancient scroll, the crinkling cellophane mimicking fragile parchment. These magical documents that stretched like Silly Putty promised we would indeed become masters of our universe. We'd never seen anything like it. It's fruit, but—not. Kind of like Coy and Vance, those “fake” Duke Boys of Hazzard.

GM's Betty Crocker has since taken over, and the formulas and flavors have been changed or discontinued. Of the original line-up only Strawberry remains (no Apricot? Boo!). As you open the silver foiled wrapper, a strawberry bouquet will hit you as if Kool-Aid Man himself has clocked you in the jaw—Oh yeah! The unrolling of the Roll-Up invites a sense of nostalgia for older folk and new adventures for kids—if they're allowed to consume all that corn syrup. And they now have printed tongue tattoo drawings for extra excitement. Good times.

Texture wise, the Roll-Up has maintained its Silly Putty stretch—it fights a little once you bite down. No anti-climactic instant gratification here. For the full experience, your tongue and the roof of your mouth should do most if not all the work—and let all that citric acid and pectin poke you into submission. Chewing gets tiresome and they're not great for the molars, though overall they are fairly smooth beasts.

The flavor is as powerful as its aroma—sweet strawberry on steroids and very familiar—yet mellowed by a more “natural” element as opposed to, say, a box of Willy Wonka Strawberry Nerds. “Made With Real Fruit,” the base of a Roll-Up is pears from concentrate. Any trace of real strawberry must be relegated to the “Natural Flavor.” Though please know: the fine print warns that “they are not intended to replace fruit in the diet.” Miss Crocker is not trying to pull any ketchup-is-a-vegetable shadiness. For the health conscious parent with time, there are plenty of recipes out there for homemade versions made with 100% fruit.

In the end you're eating candy in disguise and your face will feel like it's been slathered with strawberry lip gloss. Ultimately Fruit Roll-Ups are a fun treat for the kids in your life—and the kid in your heart. Also [wearable!](#)

## **Honeycrisp Apple**

Since we've yet to discuss the apple in its pure, singular form, please allow us a few general thoughts. Like a Reese's, there really is no wrong way to eat an apple. You may prefer to eat it cold from the fridge, its juice quenching your thirst as if from an untainted Northern Michigan stream. Or you may prefer room temperature warmth reminiscent of a freshly picked specimen from an October sun kissed orchard. You may prefer to eat it in the traditional, loose-tooth ejecting method, middle finger and thumb nestled into its stem and blossom end respectively as you gnaw your way down its brilliant but bitter core. Or you may prefer it sliced and cored into more manageable fork- and finger-friendly pieces. You may wish to enjoy it on its own or as a vehicle for peanut butter, caramel, or other desires. We approve of all of these.

The apple has been known to humankind since our West Asian ancestors began cultivating the trees many thousands of years ago. Colonists introduced cultivated apple trees to North America in the seventeenth century, the only native apple variety over in these parts being the crabapple (whose primary function of course has been to serve as projectiles in youthful backyard apple wars). The popular Honeycrisp was first developed by the University of Minnesota in 1960 and finally released to the world in 1991. Common belief cites this *cultivar*'s parents as the Honeygold and Macoun, but according to a 2004 DNA test (and Wikipedia), HC's folks are really the Keepsake and an unknown stranger. So be mindful that these guys have some deadbeat daddy issues going on.

Issues aside, these kids are doing just fine. They have the coat of an impressionist painting: brush strokes of saturated true red complimented by light green strokes beneath the surface. Some apple varieties offer up a mealy, mushy mess with each bite where you half expect an angry worm to appear and spit in your face. But each bite of a Honeycrisp (taken traditionally in our case) offers an appropriately crisp purity, chiseled layers letting go willingly as if you'd bitten into the innocent snow of a Tauntaun-free sector of Hoth. And the sound created by the upward thrust of your lower jaw is as symphonic and American as the crack of a baseball bat. To look upon the crater of exposed white flesh might even make one dream of climbing Mount Everest, or even Rushmore. Tastewise it's definitely *apple*, but there's a subtle lightness not found in other varieties that just taste dirty—and some apples can be overwhelming to the point where you don't even want to finish the job. The Honeycrisp, however, emits both autumn and spring in a single bite, conjuring both tea stained cardigans and buzzing meadows. Natural sweet with the right amount of tart (and there's always room for a little tart, areweright?).

*Honeycrisp* is both a powerful suggestion and an actual reality. A healthy, portable snack and the atomic bomb to end all apple wars.

## **Kashi Pumpkin Spice Flax Crunchy Granola Bars**

You never want anyone to say to you, "Is that a pumpkin in your pocket, or do you just have a bad case of elephantitis?" Fortunately for all us pumpkin nerds, Kashi has given us a groovy way to keep a fix handy at all times. Now, the purist faction amongst us tends to compartmentalize their pumpkin enjoyment to the "proper" autumnal season. Ordering a pumpkin scone at

Starbucks before Labor Day is to them a sin on par with colorizing old black and white films, and Tab soda. Granted, our cultural pumpkin-palooza overdrives once school starts, but some of us would go into a deep dark depression if forced to wait that long after scouring away New Years' sticky confetti and already broken resolutions.

The Kashi brand has come a long way since founders Phil and Gayle Tauber introduced their 7 Whole Grain (plus sesame seed) Breakfast Pilaf in 1984 (sorry, but “pilaf” does not scream breakfast to us at all, ew). They hooked up with Kellogg's in 2000 to become the mainstream face of healthy alternatives, and introduced their snack lines starting in 2002. Though [a recent scandal](#) surrounding the company's use of genetically modified soy could be their *Behind the Music* fall from grace moment. Oh, the price of fame.

Nevertheless, we carry on. Our box of Pumpkin Spice Flax crunchy granola bars boasts a “new tastier recipe.” The Kashi web site is experiencing a (very) mini revolution as a handful of double-commenting consumers ask them to please change it back. We only have vague sense of what the original was like, but if the new bars are too sweet for some, the main thing is they still provide our pumpkin fix. The breath of a freshly opened package conjures cardigans, hot tea, and drunken “sexy” fairies. The look is what you'd expect: a beautiful bumpy rolled oat and triticale rectangle pockmarked with pumpkin seeds and (possibly GM-ed) crispy soy grahams. Makes us hot already. Each bite delivers its promised *crunch*, and the taste is as Baby Bear would say (hey, did you know that “kashi” means “porridge” in Russian?) just right. The pumpkin tastes natural, and not syrupy like some crazed seasonal latte concoction. The holy trinity of fall spices (cinnamon, clove, and nutmeg) plus the wildflower honey bask the pumpkin in the warm glow of a graveyard lantern. As you nosh away, the mixture never gets too mushy, always providing crisps and crunches like fallen leaves beneath your feet for the entire odyssey.

Whatever their dirty little secrets, Kashi still provides a yummy and healthy enough means to carry autumn with you wherever and whenever you go. So suck it, purists.

## **Lark Fine Foods Cha-Chas**

Sometimes we just gotta say, “To hell with the kids!” That is, we need to don our blinders to cartoon character hawking cookies (we're looking at you, Keebler Elves) and wackadoodle sugary goo (we spy something that is neither fruit nor tape). We need to find something delightful for *us*. The grown-ups. While trolling our favorite Chicago area specialty food market, Treasure Island, we discovered a display of cookies from Lark Fine Foods. Their tag line, “Cookies for Grown-ups” got us way excited (maybe too excited). That one of our choices was their chocolate Cha-Chas, well, clean up on Aisle 4, please. Little did we know that we chose the variety which launched a dream for the Massachusetts-based mother-daughter company founders.

These cookies are a type of refrigerator cookie—meaning the dough is rolled, refrigerated, and then sliced before hitting the oven's inferno. The result is a near perfect cocoa circle (especially

from the bottom side) with a gorgeously smooth edge featuring 90 degree angles. Its appearance might raise an eyebrow for those familiar with that way un-American sausage “treat” known as black pudding. But think of them more as brilliant sunspots on a gold ceramic plate. These treats are all natural and not filled with softeners. The top face is alive with cracks—you might wonder how the whole things stays together. The texture might be dry for some tastes (though not for those who prefer the *edge* of their brownie). The awakening flavors make up for it.

Once chewing commences, the featured “spices” pop. While the package doesn’t specify, we feel a nice natural ginger burn along with something in the pepper family. Black? Cayenne? Not sure, but the subtle-enough heat and resulting flavor are welcome. Though the kids might freak out. But since these cookies aren’t for them, who the heck cares? (But if they do dig ‘em, know that your sacrifice in sharing will inspire informed snack choices for decades to come....) We’re also not sure what the “natural flavoring” involves, but mixed with the spices and Dutch processed cocoa (i.e. with alkali), we are not complaining.

Overall, a “deliciously different” alternative to the big boys of cookie-dom. Check out other flavors and locate retailers by state at [larkfinefoods.com](http://larkfinefoods.com).

### **Mrs. May’s Naturals Mini Crunch-Cranberry Almond (AKA Toppers)**

Grandmas can inspire us in many ways. They can inspire literary careers and lactose intolerance as they read us stories kitchen table side over warm milk. They can inspire art and naked people appreciation with a day at the museum. And they can inspire do-it-yourself fashion sense with their knack for darning socks. They can also inspire the launch of a culinary empire as one grandma did for brothers Augustine and Michael Kim back in 2002 (happy 10<sup>th</sup>, guys!) when they launched their Mrs. May’s line of all natural snacks. 2007 saw the addition of fruit to their nuts and seeds line-up. We’re sure there’s a *reason* it took five years for this no-brainer evolution, though we’re not in a position to know.

The cranberry almond Mini-Crunch has a classic flavor profile, but is presented to us free of all the bad stuff, including GLUTEN which is indeed capitalized on the adorable little mini-packet we received at the recent Snacks & Sweets Expo held in Chicago. Because “Gluten-Free” seems to be the health highlight *de jour*. “Cholesterol-Free” getting all the love? That’s sooo 1999. Or 2004. Or, what’s not a cool year anymore? Anyway, the snack’s copy also boasts them as “cute-shaped chunks of pure flavor.” Not sure how “cute” and “chunk” go together, but upon spilling these also-known-as “Toppers” in Mrs. May’s arsenal onto our plate, they did inspire a squinty-eyed *awwww*. The Kim boys did not lie (truth perhaps also inspired by Grandma). After we stacked the centimeter cubed delights into tiny castles, we popped a few in our mouth (Mrs. May’s, by the way, also “cares” about what they put in our mouths). The taste is what you’d expect: nutty fruitiness that’s not too sweet. The hint of sea salt balances out the earthy-tartness of it all.

These power cubes are good by themselves, but can indeed be used to *Top* salads, all natural ice-cream, or that vat of Hershey's chocolate syrup if that's all you have lying around. The "mini" packaging contains a single serving, so good for dieters and kids who aren't allergic to nuts. Learn more about their snacks as well as their environmental and nutritional outreach at [mrsdays.com](http://mrsdays.com).

## **Newman's Own Organics Ginger O's Crème Filled Ginger Cookies**

First, to answer all of the Wednesday Addamses out there, Newman's Own Organics Ginger-O's cookies are *not* made with real gingers. Though if we start featuring snack items of a cannibalistic bent, we're sure we'd find something tasty that is. Ginger-O's are, however, made with real ground ginger. Ginger as a health food helps treat motion and morning sickness and serves as an anti-inflammatory, treatments Miss Addams would probably disapprove of. Ginger has also been found to help prevent something called diabetic nephropathy in rats, though with 10 grams of sugar per serving, we recommend looking for other ginger ingestion methods for that one.

The thing about these delightful cookies is that kids and their grown-up counterparts can enjoy that unique burning flavor that is ginger (and *maybe* a few of the health benefits) surrounded by a short list of organic ingredients including unbleached wheat flour, powdered sugar and palm fruit oil (yes!). Kids these days have all sorts of healthy organic options, and these cookies a far cry from those generically awesome yellowy beige sandwich cookies with gristly white cream filling—you know, the kind that literally fueled generations of youth before the US adopted its official word on all things organic back in 2001. But who's to say who will turn out better in the end, right?

The baked golden brown cookie component, embossed with retro-feeling ridges, clover and star bursts, and the Newman name is light, crunchy, and natural tasting—and not quite as aggressive as a ginger snap. The cream filling is smooth and bright. Together, they make a well balanced experience that should compliment any cookie jar or lunch box—and make for a good somethin'-somethin' when you need an alternative to chocolate or fruit. If you're going to hit the sweets, you may as well do it as naturally as possible: company founder, [Nell Newman](#) (daughter of the late beloved actor turned charitable salad dressing dude, Paul Newman) says, "We focus on the kinds of products we loved as kids, but take them one step further by using the highest quality of available organic ingredients." She's one smart cookie.

Father and Daughter pose on the product line's packaging dressed in *American Gothic* garb, something Wednesday Addams might approve of if they didn't look so happy.

## **New York Style Original Bagel Crisps: Roasted Garlic**

We as a snacking people (heck, as a *people*) like to dip things into other things; to spread things on top of other things. And we seem to always be looking for new things to dip, dip into, spread, and spread on top of. At our best we are balanced, living in a harmonious cycle of give and

receive. With snacking, the physical motion and options of *what* and *how much* offer a sense of accomplishment, of “I made this!” For an alternative to chips and Ritz, we grab a bag of New York Style Bagel Crisps. Here, we highlight the Roasted Garlic variety (there are 8 in all), NYS co-founder Jim Burns’ favorite.

The bagel’s history is filled with facts and fictions—*New York Times* food writer Joan Nathan contributes a [cool overview at Slate.com](#). Did you know that a bagel bakers union was founded in New York in 1907? (And there was even bagel union drama in the early 1950s! We love snacks with a sordid past.) Thanks to those Jewish immigrants turned American business leaders and to grocery industry innovations, the once “ethnic” tough-and-chewy-on-the-outside, soft-and-chewy-on-the-inside rolls with holes have been assimilated into the whole of America.

Born out of Burns’ toasting the end-of-the-day bagels at his gourmet cheese shop for next day sales and samples, the current national retail version offers the best of both the bagel and cracker worlds. As the bag promises, they are baked, all natural, and extra crispy. Sliced to about a quarter inch in thickness, a perfect golden brown halo surrounds the light airy insides. While crisp now, a sense of past life homemade soft chewiness is evident. And of course there’s the hole. While these crisps stand up to any hummus, cheese, or dip you desire, eating them alone is a noble and satisfying undertaking. We’re not surprised that garlic is listed as the third ingredient. It might be powerful enough to blow a breathalyzer (but don’t let that scare you!) Salt and vinegar add balance to the savory profile. Ultimately, it’s about the crunch. Burns explains that the palm oil is added *before* these babies hit the oven (versus afterward like traditional crackers) so that it fries on top while the bagels bake. The oils still lingers, forcing us to wipe our fingers several times while typing this up. Have a napkin handy!

For videos and more on the company’s history and products, visit [newyorkstyle.com](#).

### **The Original Bloomer Candy Company: Dark Chocolate Graham**

Oh graham. You inspire sonnets to Kindergarten snack time, ballads to the bonfire roasted marshmallow goopiness you lovingly hold, haikus to Hillary the neighbor girl whose breath always smelled like you. You are the star of both the just-okay Golden Grahams and the brilliant but long gone [S.W. Graham](#) cereals. You are crafted by tree-dwelling elves and are a vessel for the goodness of honey, cinnamon, and chocolate. You are an early 19<sup>th</sup> century [thwarter of good times](#) “self-abuse.”

Zanesville, Ohio’s Original Bloomer Candy Company (named after its founder and not old-timey pantaloons, which were in turn named for their appropriately named inventor) has been producing an insane line-up of chocolates, classic hard candies, and gummy this-and-that since 1879. 2011 saw new owners and a focus on all natural ingredients. The year also busted milk chocolate’s stubborn monopoly over the roster with the introduction of dark chocolate. And what better way to welcome this new family member than to seductively pour it over a graham cracker? Take *that* S.W. and your prudish ways!

Our individually wrapped 2.5 inch squared graham was first coated in the chocolate, then detailed with lacey loop-de-loops making for an exquisite addition to any Victorian (or otherwise) tea-tray. The aroma is mature, the graham seeping through the grown-up friendly cacao punch. Slicing into it with an appetizer fork (yeah, we're methodical like that) unleashes cream colored cracker crumbs fine enough to snort (not that we would. . . .) Any fears of having too dry of an experience give way to the chocolate's dense chewiness. The cracker, though, offers a light and crispy balance. At first, the chocolate bullies its way into the flavor profile. But, like a red wine which starts with black cherries in the front before giving way to bacon in the back, that beloved graham flavor stands up for itself. Together, they take us back to the bonfire and that voluntary-or-not first make-out session with Hillary.

While other chocolate-cookie-cracker snacks fall somewhere on the Beiber end of the dial, the folks at Bloomer give us something here which lovingly navigates us indie-adult-alternative territory. The melodious flavors and inherent nostalgia will have you penning verses brilliant enough to rival those of Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, and Katy Perry.

### **Pro Bar Halo – Honey Graham**

The health and environment conscious folks at Pro Bar, makers of “simply real food,” have done their part to erode the separation between church and snack with their new Halo line. Positioned as a between-meal-snack or desert versus convenient “meal replacement” as are other products in their stable, Halo hits the sweet tooth where it counts with flavors like Nutty Marshmallow and today's featured Honey Graham. Non-denominational religious sentiment abounds in the snack's identity: Halo is “The Sinfully Healthy Snack” and each bar contains “zero grams of guilt.” There's even a nod to astrology as they ask, “So, what's your Halo?” as they match each variety with a personality type. Accordingly, our choosing Honey Graham makes us good listeners, advisors, and communicators. Hello, that's why you're here! You need to be shown The Way.

Breathing in the aroma of our individually wrapped perfectly portioned 1.3 ounce snack whisks us away from the city and drunk Cubs fans and to a, um, heavenly serene cabin in the woods flanked by a nut roasting factory and a giant honeybee hive. Flavorwise, things are more subtle. You're not going to get sugar smacked as with a bowl of Honey Nut Cheerios. The graham crackers offer a backbone to the texture and a delicate addition to the taste—it's not like breaking off a quarter of a perforated whole cracker and freebasing your graham directly. Interestingly, “honey” is not listed as an ingredient, but we're thinking it's hanging out somewhere in the “organic naturally milled sugar” (which gets to damn the refinery and keep all its good stuff) and “natural flavor.” Or maybe that's what the organic hemp seed is for.

But once your expectations get used to the subtle flavors, the flavors actually grow stronger. Such is the divine power of the Halo Honey Graham bar, a brilliant and substantive snack option for those who dig some sweetness but could do without the shock.

## **Select-a Sesame Seed Brittle**

Oh boy. We really wanted to like this one. They mean well. This WAY healthy Costa Rican import contains *cero* bad stuff. No cholesterol, no gluten, no fructose. *Nada*. And it's so damn cute. Like a little "pocket gay" you want to tuck in your shirt and save for later. The adorable Hispanic family on the [Select-a web site](#) makes us feel bad and tempts us to just nod our heads and smile as we work our way through it. The wrapper is written in both English and Spanish and boasts exotic phrases like *Turrón de Ajonjolí*. This translates to *sesame nougat* which begs us to ask, Can it *be* both a brittle or a nougat? (Apparently the answer is yes.) If *sin azucar* wasn't posted directly beneath the English "sugar free" we'd be like, Well that sounds like fun!

Alas. It isn't. One thing it has going, though, is its smell. It's nutty and natural, and you get a hint of the honey that binds all those seeds together. You definitely know what it isn't, and that just may be the thing you're looking for. We made the mistake, however, of taking that first bite with our incisors—and it kinda hurt. That could say more about our dental hygiene than the complete density of it all, but what White Cheddar Pirate Booty is to hydrogen, these babies are to [osmium](#). The brittle breaks up with a few quick molar chomps, thus transitioning into feeling like you're eating shredded cardboard packaging material. As for the taste, well, sesame seeds have their place: On top of burger buns and crackers, as oil, as smaller brush strokes in a larger picture. Munching on a brick of them, even with the honey, leaves a scorched chalk burn in the back of the mouth and an overall mealy vibe.

You might be like: Well duh! It's sesame seeds. And brittle. And all friggin' natural! What do you expect? We hear ya. If this is your kind of thing, we respect that. Peace be with you. For us, though, there are better healthier snacks out there.

## **Savory Thin Mini Rice Crackers: Multiseed with Soy Sauce (Trader Joe's)**

The things humans can do with rice. Trader Joe's has successfully tapped into this multi-millennia tradition with their Savory Thin Mini Rice Crackers: Multiseed with Soy Sauce. No cutesy name or cartoon characters needed—TJ's tells it like it is. Listed as both vegetarian *and* vegan, this snack is also gluten free (though "made on equipment shared with wheat, milk, and tree nuts" so buyer beware, yo.) They are also a "good source of ALA Omega-3" which is good for both our tickers and our intestines. The black sesame seeds have more calcium than boring old white sesame seeds—and are way prettier. But enough with this healthy stuff—these can't-eat-less-than-twenty minis are Communion wafers of crack. At an inch and a smidge in diameter, the best method of ingestion is to stick the mini directly on your tongue to let the soy sauce commit sinful acts with your taste buds. Upon rapture, you are officially permitted to bite down. The experience is not only multiseeded but multi-textured. The slightly sticky exterior gives way to something almost—thirst quenching; the little air pockets throughout are moon craters of pleasure; and the sesame and flax seeds add a rich substance to the moment to confirm that yes, you are indeed eating food. Lather, rinse, repeat again and again until the plastic package is forcibly rolled down, rubber-banded, and banished back into the pantry to wait for you like a jilted lover forever peeping through your real or figurative windows—a scenario as old as rice itself. Also good dipped in a little hummus.

## **Starbucks Glazed Cashews with Pomegranate & Vanilla**

Just when we thought we had at least the basic-plus snack flavor combinations down pat, sneaky Starbucks tempts us at the register as we order our morning chai lattes. Like a six-year-old grabbing that shiny package of giant Chewy Sweet Tarts behind his mom's back at the supermarket checkout, we grab a pack of Glazed Cashews with Pomegranate & Vanilla. We're not sure if we *need* them, or on which side of weird the flavor will be. But neither needing permission nor wanting to be tried as an adult for shoplifting, we dutifully toss them in front of the barista to add to the bill. While we're at it, we grab the new Shins CD (and momentarily mourn the passing of buying CDs in actual music stores and hating ourselves for resorting to Starbucks).

Ten years ago, we may all have been scratching our head and being all like pom-e-WHAT? But the pomegranate as a food trend [hit its peak](#) within the past half-decade and remains a tasty and viable heart-healthy exotic alternative to the beloved cranberry (the same cannot be said for the cumquat.) And while some snackers may prefer their cashews with either a basic hit of salt or completely virginal, others may desire a little va-va-voom with their daily nut intake.

Breathing in a freshly opened packet is like walking into a bakery first thing in the morning: a concentrated but delightfully non-oppressive sugar rush. It's a muffin without the crumbs; it's breakfast cereal without messy milk. Rolling out a few in your hand, you'll see these nuts aren't just glazed, but carbunched with dried fruit. Not only dried pomegranates, but also apples and orange peel. The fruit offers tartness, the vanilla a smooth earthiness, and the nuts a protein and iron packed crunch. And all on right side of weird (whew!) Also, the cashews don't feel waterlogged: a delicate crispness (enhanced by the base coating of organic evaporated cane juice, tapioca syrup and brown sugar) precede the meatiness that gives this snack substance. It's also fun to suck on one like a hard candy to get at the sugar and fruit before eating the nut all on its own. Two snacks in one—good work, Starbucks!

These nuts are a valid-ish breakfast substitute to balance the caffeine intake, but probably make for a better between meals snack for those of us who have long since graduated from Chewy Sweet Tarts. Starbucks, both a follower and purveyor of food trends, knows how to get us.

\* Efforts were made to keep our minds as well as yours out of the gutter with this one. Our apologies if we failed.

## **Storck Riesen Chewy Chocolate Caramels**

For all you German scholars out there, you'll know that *Riesen* means *giant*. And that's what these double chocolate bricks of chewiness are—they're at least a half size larger than your average cubed caramel. You might (possibly) also know that after the first thirty years of the Storck family candy company—who also created the beloved Werther's caramel hard candies—they did away in 1934 with their countless nameless varieties and put all efforts into Riesen, making the chocolate giant the first branded candy in Germany.

If you've pulled one from, say, Grandma's candy dish without realizing what you're getting into, be aware that these treats take a little time and effort—they aren't chew-em-up-fast Hershey's Kisses. They also have nothing to do with raisins (don't worry, it's an easy mental leap for non-German speakers.) The individual candies' mother ship packaging explains it all for you: "Chewy Chocolate Caramel covered in Rich European Chocolate." Folds of chocolate fall from an unseen divine hand and pour lovingly over a ready and waiting caramel inner core. The bag also boasts 45% cacao—that borderline between milk and dark chocolate vistas. All that cacao puts the best kind of intense chocolate flavors at the forefront, while letting the caramel take care of the smooth and teeth-pulling texture. Don't worry, traditional caramel flavors poke through, particularly as the outer layer melts away.

Riesen really does combine the best of both worlds—like the Super Bowl and Madonna. And with the Giants playing this year, we've officially come full circle. These are not pop-several-in-succession delights. But rather a rich meal capper meant to be savored long after the final bit of caramel has slid away.

### **SunChips Original (PepsiCo's Frito-Lay)**

Have you ever announced, "Gosh, I'm so hungry, I could eat the sun!"? Most folks would say *a horse* or maybe *a brick*, but you—you are in tune with the ancient peoples of the world who looked up wondering what that hot yellow ball up there was all about and who weren't shackled by our current annoying rule against staring at the sun lest we burn our eyes out. There is a theory out there which states one can stop eating all together if you practice disciplined sungazing: you will absorb enough of the sun's energy to bypass that pesky middle man known as food. Here at Snackpot Central, we get nervous about crackpot ideas about not eating, though we totally want to rent this [Eat the Sun](#) documentary we found.

Frito-Lay's answer to the sungazers comes in the form of their popular SunChips brand, first launched in 1991, a whole grain alternative to their flagship Lay's potato and Frito's corn chips. (Snack trivia: both started as separate companies but merged in 1961; Frito-Lay was bought by Pepsi in 1965). In fact, a SunChips plant in Modesto, California is powered by solar collectors literally adding the sun to its healthful boasts of 18 grams of whole grain, 30% less fat than potato chips, and "less salt than you think."

We *would* consider a steady diet of SunChips versus staring at the sun all day. The original flavor is simplified beauty: a five brush stroke masterpiece or a Raymond Carver sentence. Each 2x2 inch rippled square is filled with corn, wheat, oat, and rice flours making us feel way better about ourselves as it sheds the obesity-tainted connotations of the common potato chip. The sunflower "and/or" canola oils that give the chip its crisp lightly and unobtrusively coat the chip—and eventually your fingers. But not enough to send in oil spill first responders. The salt is just enough to satisfy: enough to hit your tongue at first bite and enough to leave behind on your lips for later. As for the "natural flavor" we're not going to worry about what that really means. This *is* a processed food item however all-natural it is.

While the brand's sun drenched imagery may not completely and realistically parallel the snack with the spiritualized sun worship of ancient peoples, it may be as solid as an offering you can get from one of the world's largest mainstream food companies. Plus they're friggin' yummy.

### **Sun-Maid Mixed Fruit**

Say the words "mixed" and "variety pack" to a snack enthusiast and instantly watch them melt into their happy place. We are a culture of choice-whores who want all the pretty colors, and who we will not be relegated to some oppressive fascist notion of possessing Just One Kind. We defy boredom. As a human species, we've been mixing foods together since *at least* the ancient Romans mixed different greens together and topped them with briny oil and vinegar (though probably before and in other parts of the world, so calm down).

That Sun Maid is smart. She knows how to please us. She knows we need on-the-go nutrition and yumminess—and that we don't have room for four separate snack packs in our man-bag or purse of choice. So, she has thrown together *four* favorite fruits into one shiny red foil pouch! From inside, an earthy, fermented, and almost rotten aroma emerges—but like totally in a good way. Think of yourself walking through an orchard at the peak of ripeness, the Sun Maid herself in tow. Reaching into this sun-kissed "sorting hat" of a freshly opened bag will tap into your deepest identity. Are you an apple: forbidden, possibly poisonous, but ultimately All-American? Or an apricot: Turkish and exotic? A pear: immortal and honored? Or a plum: wrinkled, old, and in need of a laxative? Oh wait, that's when they were called *prunes*. 'Member that? Check out [this cool write-up](#) on the prune's recent cultural make-over.

These fruits may have been dehydrated, but they still retain an agreeable concentrated juiciness as they focus our spirits on their fleshy goodness—like biting into the best ripened specimens without a mess threatening to run down your chin. The apples are sort of the odd men out; we don't really think of them ripening the way we do the others. They look like edible potpourri and feel like skin, but don't be scared. The pears have the grittiness of an old school Fruit Roll-up. And each different fruit tastes like it should—even if the flavors are more subtle than their hydrated counterparts. The plums, though sweeter, still do hold onto their prune past which could be good depending on your constitution. Like most commercially packaged dried fruits, this snack contains preservative sulfites. But organic dried apricots look diseased, so bring the sulfites *on*.

Overall, a tasty convenient fruit snack that totally beats boring old raisins.

### **Sun-Maid Dark Chocolate Yogurt Raisins**

2012 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of both the sinking of the *Titanic* and the founding of Sun-Maid. While the former is a fascinating yet distant event used to fuel Celine Dion's career and most recently as the inciting incident in PBS' *Downton Abbey*, the latter is something most of us are intimately familiar with. That ubiquitous red raisin box with its pretty girl in a red bonnet smiling and haloed by a golden sun (based on the real life Lorraine Collett Petersen of Fresno,

California) has always been a part of our lives. We reached for it as toddlers, traded it at grade school lunch hour, and scoffed at its appearance in our Halloween loot. The company has since produced a variety of snack products all deserving individual attention. This review, however, focuses on their Dark Chocolate Yogurt Raisins, the fancier cousin to their traditional Chocolate Yogurt Raisins. Dark chocolate, with its higher cacao-to-milk ratio, is higher in antioxidants and other heart-helping qualities. It also adds a more bitter taste to offset the sweetness of the raisins. Each piece is the size of a traditional raisin—slicing one in half reveals a smaller yet still substantial if chewier than usual specimen to make room for the chocolate coating. This may or may not explain the comparatively higher sugar content of a handy container of store brand raisins. The chocolate coating does amp up the fat content, though. As for the yogurt, it is brought to us by “yogurt powder” a concoction of cultured whey added to non-fat milk (does anyone say “skim” anymore?) and then dried. Perhaps it adds a creaminess to the texture, but it’s miles away from scraping the bottom of a Dannon container. You might not know yogurt was involved if the package were not labeled so. Whatever the inner workings, this snack is a flavor journey by iceberg-free sea: leave the dock with all chocolate followed by a marriage of chocolate and fruit waves crashing romantically together. As the coating gives way, the raisin alone guides you to your final destination. This snack is good on its own, as a substitute for chocolate chips in baking, and mixed with other fruits, nuts, and granolas for a homemade trail (or office) mix. Visit [Sunmaid.com](http://Sunmaid.com) for more.

## **Upper Crust Bakery Mini Lemon Bites**

Phoenix Arizona based Upper Crust Bakery is not an instantly recognized baked good brand name. It isn’t named for a little pony-riding red head or hawked by freaky anthropomorphized versions of its own products. And its name comes from a common idiom which has been incorporated by many a café and bakery across the land, many of whom may have forgotten the phrase means *snobbish* and *conceited* as well as *first class* (but it also makes us think of pie and we like that). But, since 1980, Upper Crust Bakery has worked its way into convenience and grocery stores, in-flight airline food service back when there was such a thing, and warehouse clubs like Costco. You’ve probably purchased and gorged on one of their offerings and not even known it. ‘Cause when those late night drunken sweet tooth cravings hit, do we really care who actually makes the stuff?

On a recent trip to Costco to stock up on Aussie Bites, we were both blinded by and drawn to the plastic vat of yellow orbs of sweet sunshine we’ve come to know as Mini Lemon Bites. And the only reason we’re paying attention to the brand name is for this review. But let it be known: the UCB has skillz. Each golden cake is roughly an inch and a half in diameter and one inch thick—perfect for one big gulp if you’re a pig, or a couple of satisfying bites to keep it classy. The cake is coated in light yellow icing that we’ll call canary rather than lemon. Five drizzled straight white lines add texture and visual interest. The lemon smell starts creamy and sweet up front, then hits with the tart as it reaches the back of your brain. The yellow cake alone is properly moist and alive with lemon. Maybe not enough lemon to prevent scurvy, but enough for you to give it the respect it deserves. The icing is where the tart kick comes in and together the cake and icing are the best part of a lemon drop martini on a hot summer patio—if the best part wasn’t the vodka. You might even be lucky to get a “twist” of lemon peel to chew on. Despite the long

ingredient list, the taste is natural and will give you a proper lemon buzz if that's what you're going for. And with 15 grams in each mini, a sugar buzz as well.

Upper Crust Bakery believes that “every meal of the day requires baked goods to make it complete.” We think so too, though we also believe a baked good can be its own indie mini experience.

### **Storck Werther's Original Caramel Specialties: Toffee Crunch**

Here at The Snackpot, we have an affection for “grandma candy,” the often hard or ridiculously chewy specimens associated with being handed out by, well, grandmothers. And not the cool hip kind that populate our current zeitgeist, but like *old* grandmas. *Our* grandmas. Maybe that's why we now, as adults, dig these individually wrapped worlds of wonder which once upon a time were so not Snickers or Kit Kats or even Now & Laters and which were the treats that sank to the bottom of our Halloween buckets. In the hierarchy of grandma candy, Werther's Original—along with Brach's perhaps—is probably the most recognizable, mainstream, and accessible. Their original caramel hard candies were basically the tongue-rollable version of our beloved butterscotch pudding cups.

In case you haven't thought about Werther's since maybe fifth grade, they've expanded their varieties (as any worthy-of-attention snack company has). This review focuses on their Caramel Specialties: Toffee Crunch. The Toffee Crunch wrapping is gorgeous—half brown, half gold with a red accent. The foiled shine will make you feel like you're holding treasure from a slayed dragon. The candy itself is kind of...cute, like an elongated chocolate Chicklet. You might be inspired to just stare and coo at it for moment before eating.

Because of its bite size, the thin layer of toffee is accessible—you won't have to work so hard as you would while enjoying, say, a Heath Bar or some holiday peanut brittle. (Who here immediately thinks of Candy Land when they think of peanut brittle?) Rounding out the candy's Crunch namesake are bits of almond and hazelnut mixed into the caramel. The nuts make this candy a particularly quick and hardy pick-me-up—you won't spend forever working on it like a hard candy, though you may have to spend extra time later on your molars. The flavors come together like cracked glass to a bullet hole—once the toffee is shattered, it joins the creamy European milk chocolate and nuts for a solid *POW*.

Overall, a worthy choice for those who need just a little somethin-somethin with recognizable flavors and a continental aura.

### **Whole Foods 365 Everyday Pumpkin Ice Cream**

Imagine our horror when our local supermarket chain pulled Edy's pumpkin ice cream out of the cooler a week into November—and replaced it with peppermint already! Oh, just air *A Charlie Brown Christmas* on Halloween and kill our buzz. Imagine our delight, however, when we found Whole Foods' freezer bursting with their delicious 365 Everyday pumpkin ice cream—in

February! Since this winter's been whack-a-doo, we may as well enjoy an autumnal relapse. A freshly opened carton breathes October's first cold snap. *Feel* the wholeness—feel it! The rich dark orange color, a notch brighter than pumpkin pie, looks actually like something that belongs in nature. The ice cream's surface promises a 1.75 quart deep journey into something more adventurous than plain old chocolate or vanilla.

One activity that makes our job so much fun is taking a close look at ingredients lists. We get to discover the unusual sounding building blocks of the things we snack on. Whole Foods' pumpkin ice cream contains annatto extract, a natural yellow-orange food coloring and flavoring from the red seeds of the tropical achiote tree. Also used by the Mayans as war paint. Rad! (Find out more fun facts on its Wikipedia page.) We credit the annatto's presence for being the rebel rouser kicking up the Holy Quadrumvirate of fall spices: cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, clove. These spices come together with the sugar, milk and the goopy goodness of pumpkin flesh to create a treat so natural tasting and so unlike any other flavor in snackdom. Though a little goes a long way—you probably don't want to double scoop a waffle cone with the stuff—this isn't summer time decadence. While the texture is light, the flavor is rich and can leave your face feeling more syrupy than other flavors. Even if that's part of the charm.

Whole Foods promotes that the milk in their natural ice cream comes from cows not treated with rBGH, a controversial growth hormone which increases milk production. These cows are calm, cool, and are not in such a constant state of frazzled baby booty knitting. A perfect place to find the Zen of Autumn—whatever month of the year it actually is.

### **Ritter Sport: Dark Chocolate with Hazelnuts**

Snack history quiz time! From which of the following inspirational scenarios did the German chocolate company Ritter Sport get its name? A. The (dubbed in German) 1981 *Three's Company* episode where John Ritter as Jack Tripper and his BFF Larry pick up a game of hoops with Chrissy, but lose to her because they can only concentrate on *her* bouncing balls. B. The 1893 invention by sports enthusiast Frederick von Ritter of a game combining badminton and skeet shooting affectionately called *Töten Sie die birdie*. Or C. The suggestion Clara Ritter of Waldenbruch, Germany, made in 1932 to her husband Alfred that he should produce a chocolate square that would fit snugly inside the front pocket of men's sports jackets. If you guessed 'C' you have mad deduction skills. If you guessed 'B' we wish you well in your Olympic Gold endeavors. If you chose 'A' well we fooled you—we totally made up that episode! (Or did we?)

Each Ritter Sport 100g square of chocolate is wrapped in its own distinct, vibrantly colored packaging. When presented with an assortment—from the blushing orange red of a Marzipan, to the wintry teal of Peppermint, to the rich dark brown pocked with coated nuts of our Dark Chocolate with Whole Hazelnuts—the Ritter Sport discography is an anti-Skittler's *real* “taste the rainbow.” A Ritter Sport square lights up a chocolate lover's eyes in a way that no mere Hershey's bar can dare. There's something *special* about a RSS, like a well earned hole in a favorite pair of jeans or a taxidermied family pet. The company founded by the first of three generations of Alfred Ritters celebrates 100 years in 2012, and along the way it has worked hard in its [sustainability efforts](#), for as they say, “the world isn't made of chocolate.” Oh, that it were.

The Dark Chocolate with Whole Hazelnuts celebrates 10 years this year, making it a trendsetter in the contemporary era of dark chocolate taste and healthful popularity. Ritter Sport's dark chocolate contains 50% cocoa, which falls between the European minimum of 35% and the uber-potent specimens of 80%. Tearing open a wrapper won't reveal a golden ticket, but will release dark chocolate pheromones and dreams of sipping the stuff on a terracotta-lined Spanish plaza. The Turkish hazelnuts (all 11-13 mm in diameter—would you want that sorting job?) add a morning coffee with favorite newspaper section haze. Each square is divided into sixteen break-off-able squares for sixteen delightful encounters. At room temperature, the chocolate itself offers a meaty density when you bite into it, which easily melts away into a soothing chocolate liqueur! (mind you not *liquor*.) The nuts add an always welcome crunch and savory to offset the sweet—as any good chocolate-nut tag team should do. And you can taste the distinct dark flavor lapping at the shore of its creamier counterparts.

While the Ritters envisioned well dressed soccer fans carrying a square in all their finery, modern men and women alike may consider a square of DCWH as a handy portable blood sugar and protein amplifier for all their work and play days.

### **Reese's Puffs Cereal (General Mills)**

Reese's Puffs, formerly known as Reese's Peanut Butter Puffs, were totally made for kids with a penchant for candy and the box's Sponge Bob cross-promotion, stoners with a penchant for surreal philosophizing ("It's a candy AND a cereal—whoa!"), and finally for theatre majors with a flair for the dramatic who like to watch their biology major friends' faces scrunch at the mere mention of the stuff. Originally released by General Mills in 1994, thoughts of this cereal take us back to our college house front porches where we ritually enjoyed a multi-food-group afternoon breakfast of Puffs and cigarettes, topped with Green Day's *Dookie* CD jamming from our Discman.

There is a reason why Reese's Puffs still exists while other candy-inspired cereal spinoffs—like Nerds Cereal—do not. Puffs rocks. We say this as the pillowy stream of Kix-shaped corn puffs flows into our bowl, their alternating shades of brown creating a glistening edible pebble quarry worthy of the fish tank of our dreams; as particles of Hershey's cocoa powder cloud the atmosphere with chocolaty anticipation; and as we pour on the milk hoping to, as they say, "go back again." Also, the thing about Reese's the candy is that it's pretty cross-generational. Maybe as grown-ups we'll eat only one cup now and save the other for later. Or eat two mini cups over the holidays instead of ten. But a taste for the irresistible blend of milk chocolate and sugar-wet peanut butter is tough to shake unlike the artificially flavored sugar contraptions of other candy offerings.

Like a faithful film adaptation of a beloved novel, the cereal doesn't exactly replicate the candy's flavor and texture. It can't—we're talking different art forms here. The airy-with-a-body crunch grounds us in cereal reality. To experiment, we sampled individual dry chocolate and peanut butter Puffs separately to see if there was a difference. The chocolate Puffs have a bit more crunch while the peanut butter Puffs betray their slight softness. This makes sense, as when taken

all together with milk, a distinct and satisfying peanut butter creaminess takes over before that last push into your belly. The flavor, while echoing the original, is its own beautiful thing. The chalky cocoa powder realness mixed with the peanut butter makes for a rich, almost natural flavor. While it's still sweet, you're not getting the artificial. And the sweet isn't (at least on the surface) diabetic shock inducing.

If you're not the sweet cereal type, or if chocolate cereal was never your thing even as a kid, you may not groove with us here. That's okay. You go on enjoying your muesli. Or for the purists who cry "blaspheme!" at the thought of this abomination remember, there is no wrong way to eat a Reese's (that's a law up there with gravity, yo.) For those on our page, while that first bite may not send you on a literal excellent adventure to your carefree childhood and dream-filled college years, you can still appreciate the moment as an adult, conscious of the fact you're just having a little fun. Just be sure to hide the box from your kids—and your friends who never quite grew up.