

CARAMEL CORN

When I was just a young lad, my Father had an ophthalmology practice in downtown St. Paul. Occasionally, I would go downtown with him, and I remember a wonderful popcorn shop nearby that was not much bigger than many bathrooms I've been in. They made caramel corn in the front window, and it smelled SO GOOD! It's amazing how smells can bring back memories. Hopefully, after making this recipe, you and your family will make great memories of your own.

8 cups popped Popcorn
¾ cup packed Brown Sugar
6 Tablespoons Butter
3 Tablespoons Light Corn Syrup
¼ teaspoon Salt
¼ teaspoon Baking Soda
¼ teaspoon Vanilla

Start by popping the popcorn. DO NOT use microwaveable salted/buttered popcorn! What works well is 1 Tablespoon of vegetable oil and 1/3 cup of popcorn kernels in your popcorn maker or large covered pot. Once the popcorn is popped, place 8 cups into an ungreased 9 x 13 inch pan.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat (don't cheat and make it hotter - you'll wreck it) combine the brown sugar, butter, corn syrup, and salt. Stir until the butter melts and everything is mixed well, and continue stirring until it starts to boil. When the mixture starts to boil, stop stirring and leave on the heat for exactly 5 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees using an oven thermometer. Proper temperature is very important in this recipe.

After 5 minutes, remove from heat, and add the vanilla and baking soda and stir well. It will foam up quite a bit, so don't be scared, and keep stirring until it looks like a caramel sauce again. Pour the mixture over the popcorn in the pan and mix as well as you can. I find it easiest to stir the popcorn with a spatula. You will also find that the caramel sauce thickens rather quickly, and you may not be able to completely coat every kernel. Do the best you can, it'll turn out great. Also keep in mind as you are mixing, the caramel sauce is approximately the same temperature as a lava flow and will stick quite well to your skin...so either be very careful, or wear a protective oven mitt.

Bake the popcorn mixture for 15 minutes and remove. Stir the caramel corn well to coat every kernel as well as possible. Put about 2 Tablespoons of caramel corn on the counter to cool and place the pan back in the oven for 5 minutes. Blow on the pieces you set aside to cool and taste them. If it is crisp, it's done. If it feels like it's going to pull out you fillings, it's not, so let it continue to cook until the 5 minutes is up and repeat the process. Be very careful not to overcook it. If the edges of the kernels are turning dark brown or black, it's beginning to burn which gives a bitter and unpleasant taste. If this happens, remove the discolored kernels and enjoy the rest.

When the caramel corn is done, pour/scrape the mixture on to about 2 foot length of tin foil, and spread as thinly as you can and allow to cool for 15-20 minutes. Break into smaller pieces and serve immediately, or place into zip lock bags for later.

Be forewarned, it is VERY difficult to stop eating this once you have started, and as far as I know, there are no 12 step programs to help you stop.