

Prep Time: 5 Minutes
Cook Time: 15 Minutes
Cooling Time: 30 Minutes
Total Time: 50 Minutes
Servings: 8 (1/4 cup servings)
Calories: 240 kcal per serving

Table of Contents

- ◆
- [The Flavor Profile: Why This Recipe Works](#)
- [Ingredients](#)
- [Equipment Needed](#)
- [Instructions](#)
 - [Phase 1: Preparation \(Low Intensity\)](#)
 - [Phase 2: The Sugar Bath \(Medium Intensity\)](#)
 - [Phase 3: The Finish \(High Intensity\)](#)
 - [Phase 4: Cooling and Cracking \(No Intensity\)](#)
- [Recipe Notes and Tips](#)
- [Storage](#)
- [Nutrition Facts](#)

The Flavor Profile: Why This Recipe Works

The magic of a good candied pecan lies in the contrast. You have the natural, buttery earthiness of the pecan, which is rich in oils and flavor. This is met with a shell of caramelized sugar that shatters when you bite into it. To prevent the snack from becoming cloyingly sweet, we introduce a generous pinch of sea salt and a hint of warmth from cinnamon (and optionally, a tiny kick of cayenne). This recipe uses a combination of white and brown sugar. The white sugar creates the hard, glassy shell, while the brown sugar adds a depth of

molasses-like flavor that complements the nut beautifully.

Ingredients

To achieve perfection, quality ingredients matter. Since pecans are the star of the show, try to use the freshest ones you can find. Stale nuts will ruin the batch.

- 1 lb (454g) Pecan Halves: Raw and unsalted. If you only have pieces, that is fine, but halves present better.
- 1 cup White Granulated Sugar: This creates the crystalline structure of the candy shell.
- ½ cup Light Brown Sugar: Packed. This adds moisture and depth.
- 1 ½ teaspoons Ground Cinnamon: Use a high-quality cinnamon for the best aroma.
- 1 teaspoon Fine Sea Salt: For the brine/candy mixture.
- ½ teaspoon Cayenne Pepper (Optional): If you like a “sweet heat” kick, this is essential. It doesn’t make them spicy, just wakes up the palate.
- ¼ cup Water: To dissolve the sugars.
- 2 tablespoons Unsalted Butter: This adds richness and helps prevent the sugar from burning too quickly.

- 1 teaspoon Vanilla Extract: Added at the very end to preserve the flavor.
 - Flaky Sea Salt (e.g., Maldon): For finishing. This is non-negotiable for that “gourmet” taste.
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Equipment Needed

- Heavy-bottomed medium saucepan or skillet (Non-stick works, but stainless steel or cast iron is better for even heat).
 - Wooden spoon or silicone spatula.
 - Baking sheet.
 - Parchment paper or silicone baking mat.
 - Fork (for separating).
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Instructions

Phase 1: Preparation (Low Intensity)

Time: 5 Minutes

Intensity: Low

1. Prep the Surface: Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat. Do not grease it. Set this aside. You need this ready *before* you start cooking, as the sugar sets very quickly once it hits the air.
2. Measure Ingredients: Have all your ingredients measured and within arm's reach. This process moves fast at the end (about 3 minutes), and you won't have time to measure out spices while the sugar is on the stove.
3. Toast the Nuts (Optional but Recommended): While this recipe cooks the nuts in the syrup, you can pre-toast them in a dry pan for 2 minutes to deepen their flavor. If you choose to do this, remove them from the pan before starting the sugar. If you skip this, the nuts will still be delicious, just slightly less "nutty."

Phase 2: The Sugar Bath (Medium Intensity)

Time: 8-10 Minutes

Intensity: Medium (Requires constant attention)

4. Combine Dry Ingredients: In your heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the white sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon, fine sea salt, and cayenne (if using). Whisk them together with a fork until there are no lumps of brown sugar.
5. Add Water: Pour the $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of water over the sugar mixture. Turn the heat to medium-high.

6. The Boil: Bring the mixture to a boil. It will look like a bubbling, muddy puddle. This is normal. Let it boil for about 2 minutes without stirring. The sugar needs to dissolve completely.
7. Add the Pecans: Once the sugar is fully dissolved and bubbling aggressively, add the pecans. Stir with your wooden spoon to coat all the nuts in the syrup.
8. The Glaze Phase (The Critical Moment): Continue cooking over medium-high heat, stirring constantly. This is the most active part of the recipe.
 - Initially, the mixture will be watery and syrupy.
 - After about 4-5 minutes, the water will evaporate, and the sugar will start to thicken and stick to the nuts. It will look grainy and white again. Do not panic. This is the sugar re-crystallizing.
 - Keep stirring. The heat will melt the crystals again, turning the coating into a smooth, glossy, dark amber glaze.
 - Visual Cue: You know it is done when the nuts look shiny, the syrup is thick and bubbles slowly (like lava), and the color is a deep caramel brown. If you drop a tiny bit of the syrup into a glass of cold water, it should harden instantly (hard crack stage). This usually takes about 8-10 minutes total from the time they start boiling.

Phase 3: The Finish (High Intensity)

Time: 2 Minutes

Intensity: High (Fast action required)

9. Kill the Heat: Immediately remove the pan from the burner. The residual heat in the pan will continue to cook them, so acting fast is key to avoid burning.
10. Add Butter and Vanilla: Add the 2 tablespoons of butter and the 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract. Stir vigorously. The mixture will bubble up violently (this is the steam escaping) and become very glossy. The butter separates the nuts and adds a beautiful sheen.
11. The Transfer: Pour the contents of the pan onto your prepared baking sheet. Use your spoon or spatula to spread them into a single layer as quickly as possible. Be careful—the sugar is molten hot and will burn your skin if you touch it.

Phase 4: Cooling and Cracking (No Intensity)

Time: 30 Minutes

Intensity: None (Passive)

12. The Sprinkle: While the nuts are still hot and glossy, sprinkle them with the flaky sea salt. This will stick to the glaze.
13. Cool: Walk away. Let them cool completely at room temperature. This takes about 30 minutes.
14. Break Apart: Once cool, the nuts will be stuck together in clumps. Use your hands or a fork to break them apart into individual pieces or bite-sized clusters.

Recipe Notes and Tips

- **Humidity Warning:** Sugar is hygroscopic, meaning it absorbs moisture from the air. If you live in a very humid climate, candied nuts can become sticky. To prevent this, store them with a food-grade silica gel packet (often found in shoe boxes or vitamin bottles) or keep them in the refrigerator.
- **The “Grainy” Phase:** If your sugar seizes up and turns into a white, powdery mess and won’t melt back down, you likely stirred too vigorously early on or the heat was too low. You can save it by adding 1 tablespoon of water and continuing to cook.
- **Nut Variations:** This recipe works beautifully with walnuts, almonds, or cashews. Just adjust the cooking time slightly; almonds take a bit longer, cashews a bit less.

Storage

- **Room Temperature:** Store in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.
- **Refrigerator:** Store in an airtight container for up to 4 weeks. (They will be crunchier straight from the fridge).
- **Freezer:** You can freeze candied pecans for up to 3 months. Thaw at room temperature before serving.

Nutrition Facts

Note: The following nutritional information is an estimate and will vary based on the exact ingredients and portion sizes used.

Serving Size: 1/4 cup
Amount Per Serving:

- Calories: 240
- Total Fat: 15g (Saturated Fat: 2g, Trans Fat: 0g)
- Cholesterol: 4mg
- Sodium: 110mg
- Total Carbohydrate: 26g (Dietary Fiber: 2g, Sugars: 23g)
- Protein: 2g
- Vitamin D: 0mcg
- Calcium: 20mg

- Iron: 0.5mg

- Potassium: 100mg