

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Bake Time: 45–50 minutes

Cool Time: 2 hours (minimum)

Total Time: Approximately 3 hours 10 minutes

Difficulty: Easy

Intensity Level: Low–Moderate (simple mixing, one short stovetop step, no special techniques required)

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Why You'll Love This Recipe

Pecan pie is a Southern holiday staple, but rolling out pie dough and worrying about a runny filling can intimidate even experienced bakers. These pecan pie bars deliver everything you love about the classic dessert — the buttery, caramel-like filling, the toasty pecans, the tender crust — in an easy, press-in format that feeds a crowd. The shortbread-style crust comes together in one bowl, the filling needs only a whisk and a brief stint on the stovetop, and the whole thing bakes in a single pan. No rolling pin, no blind baking, no fuss.

Ingredients

For the Crust

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ teaspoon fine salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cold and cubed

- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the Filling

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup ($1\frac{1}{3}$ sticks) unsalted butter
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup light corn syrup
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon fine salt
- 4 large eggs, room temperature
- 3 cups roughly chopped pecans (about 12 ounces)

Optional

- Flaky sea salt, for sprinkling on top
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup semisweet chocolate chips (for a chocolate-pecan variation)

Equipment

- 9×13-inch metal baking pan
- Parchment paper
- Food processor or pastry cutter (or two forks)
- Medium saucepan
- Large mixing bowl
- Whisk
- Offset spatula or rubber spatula
- Wire cooling rack

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Prepare the Oven and Pan (Intensity: Low | Time: 5 minutes)

Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C), positioning a rack in the center. Line a 9×13-inch metal baking pan with parchment paper, leaving a 2-inch overhang on the long sides. The overhang acts as handles so you can lift the bars out cleanly later. Lightly grease the parchment. Do not use a glass pan — glass heats unevenly and can cause the crust to overbrown before the filling sets.

Step 2: Make the Crust (Intensity: Moderate | Time: 8-10 minutes)

In the bowl of a food processor, combine the flour, granulated sugar, and salt. Pulse 3–4 times to combine. Scatter the cold, cubed butter over the dry ingredients and add the vanilla. Pulse in short bursts (about 10–12 pulses) until the mixture resembles coarse, damp sand with some pea-sized butter bits remaining. If you don't have a food processor, cut the butter into the dry ingredients with a pastry cutter or two forks, then finish by rubbing the mixture between your fingertips.

Texture check: Squeeze a handful of the mixture — it should hold together. If it crumbles apart, pulse in 1 teaspoon of ice water at a time until it holds.

Step 3: Press the Crust (Intensity: Moderate | Time: 5 minutes)

Transfer the crust mixture to the prepared pan. Press it firmly and evenly into the bottom of the pan using the flat bottom of a measuring cup or your fingertips. Press hard — a loosely packed crust will crumble when sliced. Push the mixture slightly up the sides of the pan (about ½ inch) to create a shallow rim that holds in the filling.

Step 4: Bake the Crust (Intensity: Low | Time: 15-18 minutes)

Bake the crust until it is pale golden brown and set, 15–18 minutes. It should look dry and matte, not shiny. Remove from the oven but leave the oven on. Set the pan on a wire rack

while you make the filling.

Step 5: Make the Filling (Intensity: Moderate | Time: 8-10 minutes)

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the brown sugar, corn syrup, vanilla, and salt. Cook, stirring constantly with a whisk, until the mixture is smooth and just begins to bubble around the edges, about 3-4 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Critical step: Let the mixture cool for 5 minutes off the heat before adding the eggs. If the mixture is too hot, the eggs will curdle and the filling will turn grainy. In a large bowl, lightly whisk the eggs. While whisking constantly, slowly stream the warm butter mixture into the eggs in a thin, steady pour. Whisk until fully combined and glossy. Stir in the chopped pecans.

Step 6: Assemble and Bake (Intensity: Low | Time: 35-40 minutes)

Pour the filling evenly over the warm crust, spreading it to the edges with an offset spatula. Scatter the pecans evenly if they clump. Bake at 350°F for 35-40 minutes, until the filling is set around the edges but still has a slight, gentle jiggle in the center (like set gelatin). The internal temperature at the center should read about 190-195°F. Do not overbake — the filling continues to set as it cools.

If the edges darken too quickly after 30 minutes, tent the pan loosely with foil.

Step 7: Cool Completely (Intensity: None | Time: 2 hours minimum)

Transfer the pan to a wire rack and cool completely at room temperature, at least 2 hours. For the cleanest slices, refrigerate for 1 hour after cooling to firm the filling. Do not slice warm — the filling will ooze and the bars will fall apart.

Step 8: Slice and Serve (Intensity: Low | Time: 5 minutes)

Lift the slab out of the pan using the parchment overhang. For clean, sharp edges, dip your knife in hot water, wipe it dry, and slice with a firm, straight-down motion. Cut into 24 bars (4 columns x 6 rows). Sprinkle with flaky sea salt if desired.

Time and Intensity Summary

Stage	Time	Intensity
Prep and pan	5 min	Low
Make crust	8-10 min	Moderate
Press crust	5 min	Moderate
Blind bake crust	15-18 min	Low
Make filling	8-10 min	Moderate
Assemble and bake	35-40 min	Low
Cool	2 hours	None
Slice and serve	5 min	Low

Active time: ~30 minutes
Hands-off time: ~2 hours 50 minutes

Storage and Make-Ahead

- Room temperature: Store in an airtight container for up to 2 days.
- Refrigerator: Up to 5 days. Bring to room temperature before serving for the best

texture.

- Freezer: Wrap individual bars tightly in plastic wrap, then foil; freeze up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator.
 - Make ahead: The crust can be baked and cooled a day in advance; cover tightly and refrigerate. The bars slice best after chilling.
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Variations

- Chocolate-Pecan: Scatter $\frac{1}{2}$ cup semisweet chocolate chips over the warm crust before adding the filling.
 - Bourbon: Add 1 tablespoon bourbon to the filling along with the vanilla; increase the flour in the crust by 1 tablespoon.
 - Maple: Substitute $\frac{1}{4}$ cup pure maple syrup for $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the corn syrup.
 - Mixed Nuts: Replace 1 cup of pecans with chopped walnuts or toasted almonds.
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Nutrition Information (Per Bar, Based on 24 Bars)

Estimated; values will vary by specific ingredients and portion size.

- Calories: ~290
- Total Fat: 20 g
- Saturated Fat: 8 g
- Cholesterol: 55 mg
- Sodium: 65 mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 25 g
- Dietary Fiber: 1.5 g
- Total Sugars: 16 g
- Protein: 3 g