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**February 2020:** Maple syrup is naturally beneficial to our health thanks to all of the nutrients it contains, as well as its anti-inflammatory compounds. It also contains many natural antioxidants that are reported to have anti-cancer, anti-bacterial, and anti-diabetic properties. The amazing nutrients that naturally occur in pure maple syrup are:

* Manganese - aids in energy production & improves overall mental stability
* Zinc - helps immune system & important bodily functions such as cellular growth & regeneration
* Calcium - great for strengthening bones & teeth
* Riboflavin - aids in metabolic processes
* Magnesium - associated with lowered risk of heart disease
* Potassium - helps to maintain a normal blood pressure

**Maple-Mustard Glazed Ham**

¾ cup packed light brown sugar

1/3 cup Dijon mustard

1 7- to 8-lb. boneless ham, spiral-cut, if desired

½ cup pure maple syrup

Whole-grain mustard, optional

In a large slow cooker, stir together brown sugar and mustard until sugar has dissolved. Place ham in slow cooker and turn, rubbing mustard mixture all over. Pour maple syrup over ham. Cover and cook on low until heated through, 4 to 5 hours. Remove ham to a cutting board and let rest, loosely covered with foil, for 10 minutes. Pour sauce into a serving bowl. Slice ham and serve with sauce on the side. Top ham with a dollop of whole-grain mustard, if desired.

**Maple-Butternut Puree**

4 cups cubed peeled butternut squash

2 tbsp pure maple syrup

1 tbsp unsalted butter

1 tsp grated peeled fresh ginger

5/8 tsp kosher salt

½ tsp black pepper

1 grated garlic clove

4 tsp roasted unsalted pumpkin seed kernels

Bring a large saucepan filled with water to a boil. Add butternut squash; cook 10 minutes or until tender. Drain. Place cubed peeled butternut squash in a food processor with pure maple syrup, unsalted butter, grated peeled fresh ginger, kosher salt, black pepper, and grated garlic clove; process until smooth. Top with roasted unsalted pumpkin seed kernels.

**Maple-Pecan Blondies**

1 ½ cups unsalted butter

4 large eggs

1 ¾ cups granulated sugar

3 cups all-purpose flour

1 tsp baking powder

1 tsp kosher salt

½ cup pure maple syrup

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 ¼ cups chopped toasted pecans, divided

Preheat oven to 350°F. Melt butter in medium saucepan over medium. Cook, whisking constantly, until butter browns & smells nutty, 5 to 7 minutes. Immediately pour into bowl. Place in refrigerator to cool, whisking every 5 minutes until thickened & creamy, about 20 min. (Butter should look like melted peanut butter.) Beat eggs & sugar with electric mixer on medium speed until thickened & pale yellow, about 3 minutes. Whisk together flour, baking powder, & salt in a bowl. Add to egg mixture in thirds, alternately with cooled butter, beginning & ending with flour mixture, beating on low after each addition. Slowly beat in maple syrup; add vanilla, & beat just until combined. Fold in 1 cup of pecans with spoon. Pour batter into a greased & floured 13- x 9-inch baking pan, spread into an even layer. Sprinkle with remaining 1⁄4 cup pecans. Bake in preheated oven until golden & a wooden pick inserted in middle comes out clean, about 35 minutes. Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool completely, about 1 hour. Cut into 24 bars.