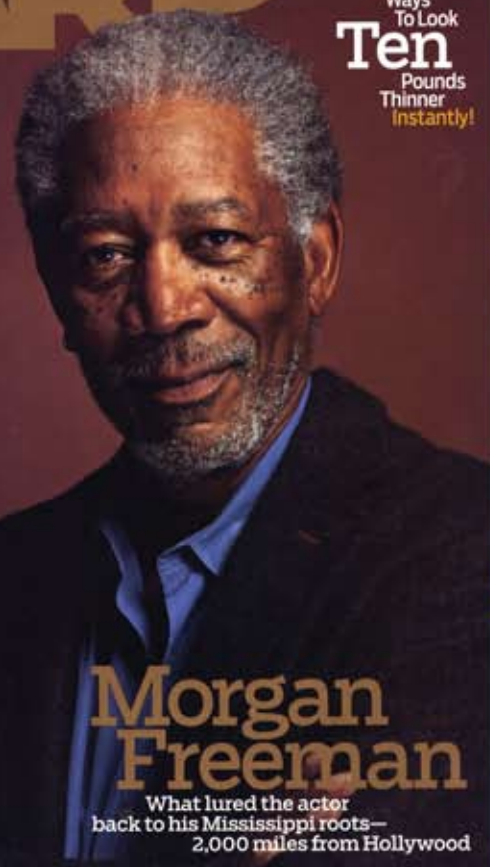


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**Morgan Freeman**  
What lured the actor  
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### Cherry and Spice Brownie Bites

Because these cookies have so much going on in both the flavor and the texture departments, a little goes a long way—you can cut these into inch-square bite bits and get a big bang out of baking effort. When it's not cookie-baking time, cut them into more generous squares, top them with ice cream maybe some fudge sauce, and you'll have a great holiday dessert. If you're baking for a crowd, make two and a

**½ cup plump dried cherries**  
(make sure they're soft)

- Center a rack in the oven and preheat to 325°F. Line an 8-inch-square baking pan with aluminum foil and butter the foil or use nonstick foil.
- In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, and spices.
- Put a heatproof bowl over a saucepan of gently simmering water. Put the butter in the bottom of the bowl, then add the chopped chocolates. Heat, stirring occasionally, just until the ingredients are melted—don't get them so hot that the butter separates. Remove the bowl from the pan.
- Using a whisk, stir the sugars into the butter-chocolate mixture. Add the eggs, one at a time. Add the vanilla and the grated orange zest and whisk the mixture energetically. Gently mix in the dry ingredients, stirring only until they are incorporated. Switch to a rubber spatula and fold in the nuts and cherries. Turn the batter into the prepared pan and even the top with the spatula.
- Bake the brownies for about 25 minutes, or until the top no longer looks wet and a thin knife inserted into the center comes out clean. Place the pan on a rack and cool to room temperature.
- When the brownies are cool, turn them over onto the rack, peel away the foil, and invert them onto a cutting board. Using a ruler and a long, thin knife, cut the brownies into 1-by-1-inch bites.
- Storage tips:** Well-wrapped and uncut, the brownies will keep at room temperature for 4 to 5 days; cut, they will keep for about 3 days. They can be frozen for up to 2 months.

**NUTRIENTS PER COOKIE** calories 51, protein 1g, carbohydrates 5g, fiber 1g, fat 4g (saturated fat 1g), cholesterol 9mg, sodium 21mg

icings or sticky frostings; cookies destined for an exchange should be sturdy, because they'll be traveling from house to house.

**Spill all your secrets** Encourage your guests to come with copies of their recipes. Swapping recipes as well as cookies makes the exchange richer. If there are stories attached, so much the better.

**Be the bag lady** Don't forget to ask everyone to bring carry-home containers for the cookies they'll collect. But do stock extras as well—decorative shopping bags and zipper-lock storage bags are ideal for those who might have forgotten theirs or who underestimated the abundance of their cookie cache.

**Make it pretty** Arrange your table so everyone's cookies can be displayed. Holiday platters and serving dishes make a beautiful table, but not many of us have a dozen of these; use what you've got, and fill in with cookie jars, cutting boards, and cookie sheets lined with holiday napkins.

**Keep the party nibbles simple** Cookie exchanges are generally a sweets-only affair, so feel free to leave it at that. Serve coffee, tea, and eggnog on the side.

**Share the wealth** Think about starting a new tradition—the giveaway. Ask each guest to bring an extra dozen, then pack them up in a big box, tie them with a pretty ribbon, and deliver them to a place where people won't have the time to bake their own cookies—the fire station, say, or the local soup kitchen. It's a sweet way to share the spirit of the season.

half times the recipe and bake the brownies in a 9-by-13-inch pan. The brownies will need a little more time in the oven this way—make sure to test for doneness with a knife.

MAKES 64 BROWNIE BITES

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- ¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Pinch of ground cloves
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 5 pieces
- 4 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, coarsely chopped
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup light-brown sugar, packed
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Grated zest of ½ orange
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

Find more great cookie-exchange recipes from Dorie Greenspan at [www.aarpmagazine.org/food](http://www.aarpmagazine.org/food)

## Baking Goodies



Turn your gingerbread men into dancing gingerbread imps with cookie cutters from King Arthur Flour (800-827-6836; [www.kingarthurfour.com](http://www.kingarthurfour.com)). Then invite a houseful of kids to join in the fun with the Posh Party Box Holiday Cookie Party, which includes aprons, hats, spoons, spatulas, and rolling pins for five guests (949-498-0664; [www.poshpartybox.com](http://www.poshpartybox.com)).



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