

## Pumpkin Seed, Rosemary, and Bacon Brittle

From 'Notes from a Maine Kitchen' (Down East Books, 2011) by Kathy Gunst

I was reviewing John Besh's wonderful book My New Orleans, The Cookbook (Andrews McMeel Publishing) and discovered a recipe for Pumpkin Seed Brittle that is scattered over a green salad with blue cheese. I was intrigued. I tried it and was hooked—a combination of sweet and spicy with meaty pumpkin seeds. But I thought I could take it a step further.

I experimented by adding chopped fresh rosemary and loved the way the herb brought out the pumpkin seeds flavor. But, what else? Well the answer to almost everything is bacon. I cooked up a few strips of thick, country-style bacon and made another batch of brittle and crumbled the bacon in and it was exactly what I looking for. Imagine a savory brittle that is both sweet (from sugar) and hot (from a good sprinkle of cayenne pepper) and earthy (from the rosemary) and chewy (from the pumpkin seeds) and fabulous (from the bacon). I warn you: this stuff is truly addictive. I've made many batches and always crave more.

Serve the brittle with cheeses, crumble it up over winter salads (mixed greens with pomegranate seeds and crumbled local goat cheese is an amazing combination) or serve it with wine and cocktails.

You can easily omit the bacon for a vegetarian version of the brittle.

### Ingredients:

2 to 3 strips thick country-style bacon\*  
1 cup sugar  
1 teaspoon salt  
1  $\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons fresh rosemary, finely chopped or 1 tablespoon dried and crumbled  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cayenne pepper  
1 cup pumpkin seeds  
1 egg white

\*You can use 2 or 3 strips of bacon depending on how meaty you want the brittle. I prefer 2 strips, making the bacon a more subtle presence but if you really love bacon go for the 3 strips.

Cook the bacon in a large skillet until crisp and cooked through, being careful not to let it burn. Drain on paper towels. Crumble the bacon into small (but not tiny) pieces and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Line a baking or cookie sheet with parchment paper or a silicon mat or aluminum foil. In a medium bowl mix the sugar, salt, rosemary, cayenne and pumpkin seeds.

In another bowl whisk the egg white for just a few minutes until it is foamy, but not stiff. If you overbeat the egg white the brittle will puff and have too much air and will not be crunchy. You only need to beat the egg for a few minutes (I do it by hand with a whisk so I can control it) until the just starts to foam. Fold the egg white into the pumpkin seed mixture.

Spread the brittle mixture onto the prepared cookie sheet, spreading it thinly and evenly. Bake about 25 minutes, or until the brittle is a good golden brown color. Remove and let cool. Separate the brittle into pieces about 1  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch big.

The brittle will keep, covered in a cookie tin or a tightly sealed plastic bag, for several days.