

caramel apples

One doesn't normally admit to crimes in public. However, in this case, my gut tells me that you've been in the same place.

The scene: A grocery store. Alone. You pass the by-the-piece candy display. Suddenly, the caramel seductively coos, "You want me. You want me." Well, yes, I do. But not a pound of you. Sly fingers nab two or three, transferring them effortlessly into a closed fist. You flee to the next aisle to unwrap, and the sweetness envelops your mouth.

The ethics of such a discount? Slippery, at best. I got into the habit of confessing my behavior to the check-out clerk. Mostly, they grinned with familiarity. Occasionally, they charged me nine cents.

While we all know what scarfing down caramels by the fistful will do to your waistline and tooth enamel, it seems to me that October should be a caramel celebration month. Think of it this way: If the leaves on trees (any of them, anywhere) are the color of caramel, you remain free to chew the sugary ambrosia until your heart's content.

Further, because October tends toward raucous behavior anyway — Oktoberfest with its brats and beers, and Halloween with its tricks and treats — commemorating the goodness

CONFECTIONS CAN CELEBRATE THE SEASON AND PROVE

GREAT JOY CAN COME IN LITTLE PACKAGES **BY MARK LUCE**



perfected by Arabs in the 11th century makes all the more sense.

Best of all, there's a great rationalization for skipping down the caramel path: caramel apples, which bring together the best of October worlds.

Fresh apples give us mega doses of fiber, a heap of potassium and vitamin C, contain no fat and can aid in the prevention of cancer and heart disease. Caramels possess a smidgen of calcium, and they taste good. When twirled together it's almost healthy ... sort of.

So when those leaves begin to turn, gather up the following and get to spinning. First, you need four apples that match your palate, whether Granny Smith (green and tart), Macintosh (juicy and tender) or Red Delicious (crisp

and sweet). Next, pick up a 14-ounce package of caramels from the store, along with some popsicle sticks. It is possible to make your own caramel (there are plenty of recipes online), but it will take much more trial and error.

Twist off the stems of the apples and shove the popsicle sticks in far enough to provide a sturdy base.

Then set out either a lightly greased cookie sheet or some wax paper.

Testing your will power, unwrap the little morsels and drop them into a deep, microwave-safe bowl with about two tablespoons of water. Nuke on high for about three minutes, stirring after each minute until the mixture is smooth.

Dip the apples fully into the caramel, spinning them to coat the apple. Then, with care, transfer them to the cookie sheet or wax paper. Once completed, put the apples in the refrigerator for about 15 to 20 minutes to let the caramel set.

Pour yourself a glass of milk or some hot cider and enjoy this match made in October heaven.

Mark Luce is a freelance writer based in Kansas City, Mo., where he's increasingly tempted to concoct a caramel-apple martini.

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