

Target's Fall Trail Mixes & Cookies Ranked

By Erica Jakeway November 30, 2024



Fall is here and there is so much to look forward to: fresh school supplies, sweater weather and, in my family, new seasonal treats from Favorite Day. Following the success of their in-house brand Good & Gather, Favorite Day was created by Target to fill a gap in their food offerings. Good & Gather focuses on more meal-making and pre-prepared items including dairy, sides like mashed potatoes, meats and many more. Favorite Day was developed for more fun noshing including snacks, bakery items, premium ice creams, beverages and many other goodies.

As long fans of this brand, we couldn't wait to indulge in a sampling of festive treats. We grabbed every trail mix marked as a "seasonal offering" and the fall sandwich cookies launched into our cart as well. Since the trail mixes are sweet here, it feels fair to rank them with sandwich cookies for your snacking pleasure. Even better, since they are pantry stable, they are the perfect standby for a sweets craving.

As a family with grade school kids, we also like to use these mixes as a dessert after dinner. They are a fun weeknight treat, and placed out as a small handful, not so much sugar that it ruins the bedtime routine. So, which sweet treat topped our list? Let's start at the bottom.

7. Trail Mix: Boo Bites



The Halloween theme of this bag immediately grabbed our collective attentions and we were excited to find a mix with chocolate in it to balance out the pumpkin spice offerings. The orange, green and purple milk chocolate candies added pops of bright color, helping the other ingredients to stand out. In addition to the candy, the bag included honey-roasted peanuts, dark chocolate-covered pretzel balls, cookie pieces with orange and purple sprinkles, and white chocolate-covered raisins and marshmallows.

Trying each piece of the mix independently, the individual components were nice. The honey-roasted peanuts, milk chocolate candies, and white chocolate-covered raisins were the standards that you would expect. The cookie bites were nice and sweet with a mild vanilla flavor. The enjoyment of the pretzel balls split 50/50 in our house. The dark chocolate coating leaned toward bittersweet over semi-sweet, and two of us thought it was too bitter. The star individual component was the white chocolate-covered marshmallows for flavor, texture and fun.

In our eyes, this mix lost its impact when eaten as a big handful. While we were conscious of having a piece of everything, the balance of flavors became very bland when eaten together. It tastes fine and has some crunch, but compared to the other options it neutralized itself. It's just sweet with a chocolate after flavor that was a bit too bitter. The ruling: it's best to either nibble piece by piece or move to the next option.

6. Trail Mix: Candy Corn Crunch



Lovers of candy corn, this bag is for you!

To begin, the *second* my kids saw a mix with candy corn on Target's website they were on board and excited. As we opened the package, we could smell the candy corn and the honey-roasted peanuts. Pouring out the ingredients, we found honey-roasted peanuts, candy corn, raisins and white chocolate pretzel balls.

As individual components, there were no surprises here. If you historically like these ingredients, they will taste good here. Experienced as a carefully selected handful of the mix, candy corn dominated the bite. The least flavorful component is the pretzel; they really get lost in there. They are nice for the orange color, but the peanuts add more crunch throughout the bite with other more powerful flavors. As the bag has the greatest amounts of peanuts and raisins, they do pull through in terms of flavor and some handfuls may be taken over by that pairing as well. With other more creative mixes we tried, this one stayed at the bottom of our rankings. Overall, if you look forward to candy corn, this mix might be a great way to enjoy the seasonal candy without surrendering to a massive sugar rush of the candy alone.

5. Sandwich Cookie: Jack-o'-lantern



When you think sandwich cookie, the classic chocolate cookie with vanilla crème filling likely pops into your head. And why not? Those flavors are traditional and enjoyable. Upon tasting our Favorite Day rendition, keeping typical expectations in mind, we found these to be a little less sweet than average. The cocoa flavor was a little more intense. One kid loved that, though she picks chocolate above other flavors. The other kid thought she was not getting the crème's flavor with so much cocoa. The adults fell in the middle, the more intense chocolate was nice, but it also diminished the filling a bit. As we polished off the box over the next few days, I started to really appreciate the richer flavor of the chocolate. I would be more likely to buy Favorite Day chocolate sandwich cookies over other brands for this reason. It satisfies that chocolate craving better than other options.

In terms of seasonal flavor, these cookies do not have anything that speaks to fall. In the looks department, the jack-o'-lanterns are playful and absolutely fun. To celebrate spooky season, having cookie jack-o'-lanterns as a part of the spread would make a great visual addition. Plus, they are just fun to have in the pantry as you build anticipation for Halloween.

4. Trail Mix: Pumpkin Spice



Just looking at the package, the pumpkin-shaped mello cremes visually jump out at you. Those with children might notice a big excitement to take those home, based on that one component alone. Upon opening the bag, a light pumpkin spice scent is there, but not particularly noticeable unless you are taking the time to consider it. Beyond the pumpkin mello cremes, the assortment was filled with honey-roasted peanuts, pumpkin spice pretzel balls, pumpkin spice mini cups, and pumpkin spiced clusters.

As we considered the parts individually, the same honey-roasted peanuts that were found in the other mixes were our least interesting bite. Next, we tried the pretzel balls, which were coated in a heavily seasoned coating of pumpkin spice with a salty interior. They were good, although I would not sit around eating a bag of pretzel balls without the mix. Pumpkin spice clusters were almost nonexistent. It took finding several to eat at once to realize they were coated with the same topping as the pretzel balls. They essentially blend into the same flavor pallet, so the small overall proportion does not impact the mix as a whole.

The pumpkin-shaped mello cremes were a delicious surprise. Unlike the standard issue which tastes like corn syrup, they have a pumpkin spice flavoring which is lovely. We did take issue with their texture. Important note here: we did not open them until our tasting and the expiration date was next July. Yet, biting through one was so difficult, especially for the kids. To taste the mix as a bite we wanted to cut them down so the kids could fit the handful in their mouths. I couldn't cut the cremes with a butter knife and a lot of pressure,

which I think should be reasonable for this type of candy. Maybe we had an off-bag, but I would hope this is something that Target could improve for the future.

The pumpkin spice mini cups were the stand-out favorite. The tastes almost like a well-made pumpkin spice bark, balancing both white chocolate and pumpkin spice. If you are listening Target, we want these little gems for baking! They would be so fabulous just about anywhere you would add chocolate chips. Plus you could put them on top of other desserts, like ice cream. They are snack mix gold.

When tried together, the mix has a good variety of textures. The overwhelming flavor is intense pumpkin spice, with observations of sweet and salty, not peanuts and pretzels. The balance of sweetness, spice and salt from the pretzels works here. For those looking for pumpkin spice in a snack mix, the strong flavor in this mix will definitely satisfy.

3. Sandwich Cookie: Pumpkin Spice Crème



One of my first observations, before we even opened the cookies, was the gluten-free label on the box. This led to our next observation when we pulled the cookies out. They were a little more crumbly than the standard flour-based cookies, leading to more breakage in the box. We were also struck with the aroma of pumpkin pie spice. The kids thought it smelled like our favorite spiced pumpkin bread. My immediate association was pumpkin pie.

Our first reaction to a full bite of cookie was that the spice was really intense. Almost too intense. However, as we took a few bites, we settled in and appreciated its punch. We

could taste pumpkin pie seasoning in both the cookie and the filling. As cream fillings go, it was a little dry alone, almost grainy. As a complete morsel, that was not evident. If you love pumpkin pie spice, this is going to dazzle you. I felt like the extra kick from the spice would keep me from sitting down and plowing through the box alone. A small amount satisfies, which can be a good thing.

2. Sandwich Cookie: Pumpkin Cheesecake



As we opened this package, our noses were treated to another pleasant aroma. We could predominantly smell the sweet cheesecake filling, with the spice cookie lingering at the end. In a smart move, Target describes these as a crispy sandwich cookie on the box, as the appearance alone does not entirely tell you what to expect. They held up very well in the box, due to the crisp nature of the cookie.

We observed that this cookie did indeed taste sweeter than the pumpkin spice crème, likely due to the absence of spice in the filling. The spice in the cookie added a warmth that just tasted like the holidays. You could picture eating these with just about any warm beverage. The flavor was nicely balanced and left you wanting to eat just one more.

1. Trail Mix: Scarecrow Crunch



At the end of August, as we were woefully bidding farewell to the summer, we sat around the table listing the fall things we were looking forward to. Right up there with apple orchard doughnuts sat Scarecrow Crunch Trail Mix. It has long been a family favorite due to its individual components and collective group flavor. Every bite is enjoyable.

Upon opening the bag, you can smell that classic pairing of peanut butter and chocolate. The bag revealed a mix filled with peanuts, peanut butter candies, milk chocolate-covered cereal squares, white chocolate oat cereal, and milk chocolate marshmallow bits. The mix was wonderfully fall-colored. You get dark brown from the marshmallows and some peanut butter candies. Light brown from the cereal square. Orange pops in with the coating of the oat cereal and, again, the peanut butter candies. And finally yellow from more peanut butter candies. This palate works for the whole fall, so you can serve it festively from Labor Day until Thanksgiving.

Considering the individual parts of the mix, some were neutral and some shone brightly. For the neutral elements, the peanuts were just plain, with no additional seasoning. Also, the peanut butter candy bits were tasty and a nice change from chocolate, but standard. The white chocolate cereal squares are wonderful, with good white chocolate flavor and crunch. There was great debate over which was better, the chocolate-coated cereal vs the chocolate-coated marshmallow. Both are just fantastic and we could eat bags full of either. The marshmallows are like having a little bite of hot chocolate, since they use those mini-dehydrated marshmallows found in most store mixes. The milk chocolate-covered

squares are missing the peanut butter found in a recipe like Puppy Chow. However, with the other peanut butter elements, keeping them as chocolate only was a way better choice.

When enjoying this mix as a handful with all the parts, you were treated to a sweet peanut butter flavor first, rounded out by chocolate at the end. The crunchy texture was varied and great too. Plus, in this mix, you can also pair components in couples and that is fantastic too. I could even see adorning an ice cream sundae to make it fall and festive. It received our highest rank for variety in the mix, plus everything tastes good no matter how you eat it.

Methodology:



These delicious selections were devoured, I mean tested, by a treat-loving family of four. We are made up of two adults and two grade school kids. We sampled the cookies both as complete bites and also dissembled them to taste the cookie and cream filling separately. As for the trail mixes, we tasted each ingredient separately first, to simulate snacking on a piece. Then we went for a balanced handful, to assess the mix as a complete bite.

Our ranks are based on both individual components, as well as flavor balance as a whole. Additional marks were given for texture. Finally, but probably most significantly, we considered the seasonal elements in both flavor and appearance.

These treats were acquired by us personally. We did not receive compensation for our review.



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