

CHOC-O-BLOC

CHOCOLATE WORKSHOP

"Quite simply we are selling FUN, but we're coating it in chocolate first"

How is chocolate made?

Workers cut the fruit of the cacao tree, or pods open and scoop out the beans. These beans are allowed to ferment and then dry. Then they are cleaned, roasted and hulled. Once the shells have been removed they are called nibs. Nibs are blended much like coffee beans, to produce different colours and flavours. Then they are ground up and the cocoa butter is released. The heat from the grinding process causes this mixture of cocoa butter and finely ground nibs to melt and form a free-flowing substance known as chocolate liquor. From there, different varieties of chocolate are produced.

What kinds of chocolate are there?

Depending on what is added to (or removed from) the chocolate liquor, different flavours and varieties of chocolate are produced. Each has a different chemical make-up, the differences are not solely in the taste.

Unsweetened or Baking chocolate is simply cooled, hardened chocolate liquor. It is used primarily as an ingredient in recipes, or as a garnish.

Semi-sweet chocolate is also used primarily in recipes. It has extra cocoa butter and sugar added. Sweet cooking chocolate is basically the same, with more sugar for taste.

Milk chocolate is chocolate liquor with extra cocoa butter, sugar, milk and vanilla added. This is the most popular form for chocolate. It is primarily an eating chocolate.

White chocolate is somewhat of a misnomer. In order to be legally called 'chocolate' a product must contain cocoa solids. White chocolate does not contain these solids, which leaves it a smooth ivory or beige colour. Real white chocolate is primarily cocoa butter, sugar, milk and vanilla. There are some products on the market that call themselves white chocolate, but are made with vegetable oils instead of cocoa butter. White chocolate is the most fragile form of chocolate; pay close attention to it while heating or melting it.

Decorator's chocolate or confectioner's chocolate isn't really chocolate at all, but a sort of chocolate flavoured candy used for things such as covering strawberries. It was created to melt easily and harden quickly, but it isn't chocolate.

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Chocolate has been the subject of many stories and myths throughout history. Some, are based on fact, others are not.

Can I give chocolate to my dog (cat, bird, other pet)? **NO.**

The theobromine in chocolate that stimulates the cardiac and nervous systems is too much for dogs, especially smaller pups. A chocolate bar is poisonous to dogs and can even be lethal. The same holds true for cats, and other household pets.

Is there caffeine in chocolate? **YES.**

Although there is less caffeine in chocolate than there is in a cup of coffee, people who are avoiding caffeine should unfortunately stay away from chocolate as well. There are about 30 milligrams of caffeine in your average chocolate bar, while a cup of coffee contains around 100 to 150 milligrams.

Doesn't chocolate cause acne? **NO.**

This is another myth about chocolate. While some people might be allergic to chocolate, or some of its ingredients, doctors have disproved the belief that chocolate causes acne universally for some time.

What is the history of chocolate?

Mayans and Aztecs of South America took beans from the "cacao" tree and made a drink they called "xocolatl." Aztec Indian legend held that cacao seeds had been brought from Paradise and that wisdom and power came from eating the fruit of the cacao tree.

The word "chocolate" is said to derive from the Mayan "xocolatl"; cacao from the Aztec "cacahuatl". The Mexican Indian word "chocolate" comes from a combination of the terms choco ("foam") and atl ("water"); early chocolate was only consumed in beverage form.

Christopher Columbus is said to have brought back cacao beans to King Ferdinand from his fourth visit to the New World, but they were overlooked in favor of the many other treasures he had found.

Eating chocolate was introduced in 1674 in the form of rolls and cakes, served in the various chocolate emporiums.

By the 1990's, chocolate had proven its popularity as a product. Annual world consumption of cacao beans averages approximately 600,000 tons.

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Cooking with chocolate.

Chocolate is a very tricky food to cook with. Temperatures that are too high can scorch it, temperatures too low can cause it to harden unevenly. It must be watched very carefully. But if you can master the art, you can create some breathtaking results. Below are some things to know about cooking with chocolate.

What is tempering?

In order for chocolate to cool into a hard candy and not a mushy goo, it must be tempered. This is a process where the chocolate is slowly heated, then slowly cooled, allowing the cocoa butter molecules to solidify in an orderly fashion.

Once you've got a complete melt, letting the chocolate cool slowly while stirring it or working it will encourage the cocoa butter to arrange itself in a way that is particularly useful for making candy. This is 'tempering' the chocolate.

There are a couple of ways for encouraging the cocoa butter into its stable arrangement. In the interests of hygiene we keep the liquid chocolate in a sealed bag, which can be manipulated safely and without mess to bring about the proper 'crystallisation' of the cocoa butter molecules. Other techniques are to Stir the molten chocolate, 'seed' the molten chocolate by putting in little pieces of solid chocolate. The molten cocoa butter then will do a kind of follow-the-leader and arrange itself after the fashion of the solids. Which is what you want. The hazard with seeding your chocolate is that you might get little air pockets associated with the solid pieces. Traditionally, small batch chocolate is tempered on marble slabs. Just pour it on and work it with a spatula until it becomes kind of slushy-mushy.

The next tricky step is to maintain enough heat to keep the chocolate molten, but not heat it up so much that it forgets how to arrange itself. Overheating the chocolate will make the cocoa butter separate from the cocoa solids, and that's a bad thing. Indication that you're overheating the chocolate is either chocolate bloom in the hardened chocolate or out and out separation of cocoa butter in the chocolate soup.

What is this white, blotchy stuff on my chocolate?

A white, filmy residue on chocolate is called a bloom. It occurs when some of the cocoa butter in the chocolate separates from the cocoa solids, usually when the chocolate is stored in a warm area.

Many thanks to www.chocolate.org for the source of this information.