

Chocolat

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Chocolate 101

Chocolate as we know it begins with the prized fruit of the cocoa tree (theobroma cacao). The cocoa tree is an evergreen with quite specific growing conditions. There are only few places on earth that meet these conditions. The cocoa belt, as this area is known, lies within 8 degrees to the north and south of the equator. This area of consistently warm temperatures and high humidity provides the cocoa tree with its required temperature range of 64-89 degrees Fahrenheit, humidity of 80% during the day, and rainfall of 59-79 inches per year. The cocoa tree grows to about 20-30 feet tall, usually in the semi shade of the taller trees. A cocoa pod is produced when the bisexual flower is pollinated by a small midge. The pod is 6-10 inches long and 3-4 in diameter, and usually contains 20-40 seeds. A tree usually begins producing cocoa pods after three years. Cocoa trees bear fruit, flowers and growing pods at the same time. Therefore harvest can take place all year long but usually occurs from March through May and October through November.

The cacao tree (Theobroma cacao) is a native of Central and South America. Today, it is cultivated around the equator, and can be found in the Caribbean, Africa, South-East Asia, and even in the South Pacific Islands of Samoa and New Guinea. There are three main varieties of cacao trees. The most common is Forastero, which accounts for nearly 90% of the world's production of cacao beans. Rarest and most prized are the beans of the Criollo variety. Their aroma and delicacy make them sought after by the world's best chocolate makers. Finally, there is a Trinitario variety of cacao, which is a cross between Criollo and Forastero.

Chocolate- a feel good food

One of the most pleasant effects of eating chocolate is the "good feeling" that many people experience after indulging. Chocolate contains more than 300 known chemicals.

Caffeine is the most well known of these chemical ingredients, and while it's present in chocolate, it can only be found in small quantities. Theobromine, a weak stimulant, is also present, in slightly higher amounts. The combination of these two chemicals (and possibly others) may provide the "lift" that chocolate eater's experience.

Phenylethylamine is also found in chocolate. It's related to amphetamines, which are strong stimulants. All of these stimulants increase the activity of neurotransmitters (brain chemicals) in parts of the brain that control our ability to pay attention and to stay alert. While stimulants contribute to a temporary sense of well-being, there are other chemicals and other theories as to why chocolate makes us feel good.

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Dark chocolate truffles

Ingredients

Heavy Cream	4oz (113g)
Dark chocolate (chopped)	7oz (198g)
Butter (unsalted)	½ oz (14g)
Cocoa Powder	for finishing

**Use your favorite nuts, cookies, cereal or candy crushed or chopped to finish the chocolates*

Ganache A glaze, icing, sauce, or filling for pastries made from chocolate and cream. Ganache is made by heating cream then pouring it over the chopped chocolate. The mixture is stirred or blended until smooth, with liqueurs or extracts added at the end if desired.

Variations

You can add ½ ounce (14 grams) of desired liqueur to the finished ganache. Grand Marnier, Baileys Irish cream, Amaretto and Frangelico work very well.

Infusion

Add ½ ounce (14 grams) of your favorite fresh herb to the hot cream, let sit covered for 10 minutes. Reheat the cream and strain over chocolate and stir. If infusing with tea use 4g of loose leaf. If using instant coffee or espresso (3g).

Directions

1. Pour the cream and butter into a saucepan or microwave safe bowl and bring to boil.
2. Pour hot cream mixture over the warm chopped chocolate, wait 10 seconds until chocolate is melted and slowly start to whisk or stir to combine the mixture. Mixing from center out working towards the sides of the bowl. Once chocolate is glossy stop mixing. Mixture must be smooth, if it has chunk microwave on low for 5 seconds to melt the chunks out.
3. Pour the ganache into a shallow dish or bowl and let rest in the refrigerator for 2-3 hours. Once the chocolate has set/hardened yet is soft to the touch you can scoop or spoon out truffles.
4. Roll the ganache centers in cocoa powder, confectionery sugar, chopped nuts crushed candy canes or sprinkles and serve at room, temperature.