

Chocolate: Always In Season

Chocolate Recipes

Fudge Sauce
Double-Chocolate Brownies
Chocolate Silk Cheesecake
Chocolate Meringue Kisses
Chewy Chocolate-Chip Cookies
Bittersweet Chocolate Pudding
White Chocolate-Apricot Muffins
Cranberry-Chocolate Crumble

A little trivia:

Although you'd never know it from the taste, chocolate comes from the Aztec word *xocolatl*, meaning "bitter water." Montezuma, the king of the Aztecs, supposedly drank 50 golden goblets of it every day (he believed it an aphrodisiac). A tropical cocoa bean called *Theobroma* (food of the gods) cacao is the source of this delicious confection.

Different kinds:

Unsweetened: Also called "baking" or "bitter," this is the purest chocolate you can get, with nothing added.

Bittersweet: Add sugar, lecithin (for a wonderfully smooth texture) + vanilla, and you get the bittersweet version.

Semisweet: Although it contains the same additives as its bittersweet cousin, semisweet chocolate has a little more sugar (but less fat).

Milk: Adding dry milk to sweetened chocolate creates the basis of so many of your favorite candy bars.

White: We hate to break it to you, but this isn't true chocolate--it contains no chocolate liquor, a paste from which all versions of the real thing are made. And as anyone who's tried it knows, it doesn't taste very chocolaty, either. Ingredients usually include sugar, cocoa butter, milk solids, lecithin (for texture), and vanilla.

Storage tips:

Ideally, chocolate should be tightly wrapped and kept in a cool (60-70 ° F), dry place (NOT your refrigerator). Stored this way, dark chocolate can last up to 10 years; milk and white chocolate, however, will only keep for about nine months, as both contain milk solids -- so don't wait too long to satisfy that sweet tooth. **Note:** Even if chocolate has been poorly stored, it can still be used, although both the flavor and texture may be slightly affected.

Cooking tips:

While bittersweet and semisweet chocolate can sometimes be used interchangeably in recipes without really affecting the texture, milk and white chocolate cannot, because they contain milk protein.

Melting:

First, coat the container in which you plan to melt the chocolate with nonstick spray. Then melt it slowly over low heat (chocolate - especially the white variety - scorches easily). One

method to try is to place the chocolate in the top of a double boiler, melt it halfway over simmering water, then separate the top pan from the water and stir until the chocolate is completely melted. Another effective option is to put the chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl and heat at MEDIUM (50%) until melted. As ovens vary in power, watch closely to make sure it doesn't burn. **Note:** Semisweet chips and squares hold their shape as they melt, so if you wait for them to look melted, they'll probably scorch. Also, be aware: smaller pieces melt more quickly than larger ones.

Be sure to cool melted chocolate to room temperature before adding it to dough or batter.

To grate chocolate, choose a large, thick piece that has been kept at room temperature. Wrap a piece of paper towel around one end, so the warmth of your hand won't cause the chocolate to melt, then firmly run the chocolate over the coarse side of the grater.

To create flakes, which make a wonderful garnish for desserts ranging from cakes to puddings to ice creams, run a vegetable peeler across a chilled bar of chocolate.

Substitution tricks:

3 TBS unsweetened cocoa plus 1 TBS butter = 1 oz unsweetened chocolate.

1/2 oz unsweetened chocolate + 1 TBS granulated sugar = 1 oz semisweet chocolate.

1/2 C + 1 TBS unsweetened cocoa, 1/4 C + 3 tablespoons granulated sugar, and 3 TBS butter combine to = 6 oz semisweet chocolate chips.

Nutritional info:

Indulge in 1/2 oz chocolate (about 27 regular-sized chips) and you'll consume 60-80 calories, 0-1.0 gr fiber, about 1.0 gr protein, 3.5-5 gr fat (a little more than half of it saturated), 0-15 mgs sodium + 0-3.0 mgs cholesterol. Generally, white chocolate has the most calories, fat and sodium; semisweet has the least.