

INSPIRATIONS FOR YOUR HOME & GARDEN

Thursday, February 7, 2008



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IN LOVE WITH CHOCOLATE

BY KRISTINE KISKY
for *The Columbian*

A box of chocolates. It's a loaded present.

Think about it. You probably aren't going to give a co-worker a heart-shaped box of chocolates as kudos for a great PowerPoint presentation. But you would present someone you're super sweet on with the lovely little candies.

"If you present someone with a box of chocolates, (the recipient) thinks, 'You must be very fond of me, so you buy me chocolates,'" relates Ian Titterton, baking professor in Clark College's culinary arts department.

Why do humans equate chocolate with love?

"Actually, there's a scientific reason for that," explains Titterton. "There's a chemical in chocolate called phenylethylamine." Also known as the 'love drug.' "That is a chemical that has a similar effect on the brain receptors as does amphetamines, as does marijuana. That's not to say it's the only reason (people love chocolate), but it's just one reason chocolate is so closely connected with love for someone. Plus, chocolate also contains another stimulant, theobromine, and trace amounts of caffeine. All those things in concert,

when it hits brain receptors, for some people it's quite a rush."

In fact, says Titterton, "For people with very very sensitive receptors, eating chocolate can give you a feeling of euphoria, that euphoric feeling you get when you fall in love."

A former chocolatier with Moonstruck Chocolate Co. in Portland, Titterton's interest in cacao continues to grow. "It's a magical substance. I've always been fascinated by it and over the last few years I've been absolutely in awe about it," he confesses. The professor will soon travel to Belize to study a cacao growing operation. Chocolate "is my passion and forte," he proclaims.

Long love affair

Our society isn't the first to place a high premium on chocolate. Ancient Aztecs revered the cacao tree, viewing it as a source of strength and wealth and using its beans as currency. Like the Mayans before them, the Aztecs ground cacao beans and used them as the primary ingredient in a frothy drink. While

common folk partook on rare occasion, the sacred brew was primarily reserved for rulers, priests, decorated soldiers and honored merchants. The beverage was bitter and spicy. "Chocolate as we know it is not the chocolate like the Aztecs used to drink," informs Titterton.

With Spain's conquest of Mexico in 1521, the joy of chocolate was introduced to Europe. The Spaniards sweetened the beverage with sugar, and added other spices to the mix. However, because it was a rare and expensive import, chocolate remained an elite treat for the upper class for more than two centuries.

The 1700's Industrial Revolution brought steam engines, which were used to mechanize the cocoa grinding process. This caused the price of cocoa to drop, and chocolate beverages were finally in the mugs of the masses.

Irish-born chocolate maker John Harmon established the first chocolate factory in the British colonies, in the Boston area in 1765.

By the 1800s, chocolate candy was being mass produced around the globe,

with a series of inventions and ingredients helping to improve its taste and texture.

Daniel Peter of Switzerland was credited with perfecting the manufacture of milk chocolate in 1875. Milk chocolate is now the world's best-selling variety.

Here and now

Americans have always loved their chocolate, but in recent years, our taste for all things cocoa has grown more sophisticated.

"When I first came to U.S. close to some 30 years ago ... it was difficult to find good chocolate anywhere," says Titterton, his British accent still intact. "You would go into nice a grocery store and you might be able to find Tobler," but that was about as gourmet as it got. It was more likely a shopper in the '70s wouldn't find much beyond "a bar of Hershey's or Cadbury," both "milk chocolate, which was very sweet," reflects Titterton.

With milk chocolate bars, says Titterton, it's impossible to assess the quality of the chocolate on its own due to other ingredients, most notably the milk,



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Clark College professor Ian Titterton offers a chocolate-coated lesson to baking student Erica Hall.



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It is said that two ounces of dark chocolate has as many antioxidants in it as drinking a glass of red wine.

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mixed with it. On the other hand, “With dark chocolate, what you eat is what you get,” but back in the day, “If you were fortunate to find dark chocolate, it was pretty low caliber,” Titterton recounts.

“The average bar of chocolate for Americans, once upon a time, has been about 70 percent sugar and 30 cocoa solids,” informs Titterton. By contrast, “In Europe, reverse those figures.”

But the times are changing stateside. “Now, there’s a huge selection of chocolate,” observes Titterton. “Now, when you go into an upscale grocery store, a label may say 70 percent (cocoa solids). You never got that before. Now the public is being educated. Some companies are even going further, listing (the chocolate’s) country of origin,” and even including information about the soil the cacao beans came from—the same type of information that’s sometimes seen with fine wines, notes Titterton.

In addition, “A lot more emphasis is being put on dark chocolate for many, many reasons—certainly for the flavor,” says Titterton. “A few years ago, the AMA,” or American Medical Association, “after much agitation from the Chocolate Manufacturers Association, finally said, ‘Yes, there is a health benefit to dark chocolate.’ Two ounces of dark chocolate has as many antioxidants in it as drinking a glass of red wine.” That being the case, “To be on the safe side, I drink a glass of wine and eat dark chocolate every night,” Titterton cracks with a chuckle.

Over all, “People are becoming a lot more educated (about chocolate). They’re certainly becoming more picky, as they should,” the professor proclaims.

Candy creations

For the vast majority of people, a box of pretty little chocolates is something procured from a store. But here’s a newsflash: You can make the tasty treasures yourself.

That said, making chocolate candy is no piece of cake.

Crystalline in nature, “Cocoa butter is a polymorphic fat, which means it has more than one crystal setting,” begins Titterton. “It has five crystal settings, though one is so unstable it barely exists.” In order to produce quality chocolate candy, “What you have to do is segregate one particular crystal formation. It’s that crystal that gives the chocolate all the snap, the gloss, the mouth-feel and the contraction if you put it into molds,” he explains. This is achieved through tempering, where chocolate is stabilized through a carefully controlled melting-and-cooling process. “If you don’t temper it, it won’t do any of those things,” informs Titterton.

At home, tempering can be done by placing uniformly sized chocolate chunks in the top of a double boiler, stirring it steadily while bringing the temperature to 115 degrees for dark chocolate or 110 degrees for milk or white chocolate. The chocolate is then cooled and briefly (to between 83 and 86 degrees, depending on the chocolate), before reheating it to between 87 and 89 degrees (again, depending on the type of chocolate). To use the tempered chocolate, it must be kept warm (in the 85 to 88 degree range), but not hot.

When tempering chocolate, “Precision is an absolute necessity with it,” the professor says. “A lot of people get frustrated. If you don’t take the time or have the patience and if a person doesn’t care for that type of regimented recipe, chocolate candy making is probably not for them,” he appraises.

Getting the right ingredients is another crucial step to success. “There are so many different kinds of chocolate out there,” observes Carol Winner of The Decorette Shop, a cake and candy making supply store in Portland. All-too-often rookies “run to the grocery store and buy chocolate chips instead of chocolate formulated for (making candy),” she reports. At The Decorette Shop, “We have Callebaut, Guittard, several kinds of gourmet chocolate, and samples if someone wants to ask,” Winners informs. In addition, “We have an upstairs full of chocolate molds—hundreds of them.”

While people can go it alone, experimenting in the privacy of their kitchen, “In my opinion and from my experience, doing a class is more successful,” Winner says of making chocolate candies. “There are a lot of variables,” and getting tips from someone who has been there and done that can save an aspiring chocolatier lots of time and grief.

“I’d probably have a person begin by melting a compound coating and molding a little bit of it so they get the feel of chocolate and learn to work with it,” suggests Winner. “Then once you have your feet wet, truffles are a wonderful place to go.”

The Decorette Shop has recipe books and staff who can answer questions from those hoping to hand-make chocolate candies.

Working with chocolate “is a balance between science and art,” says Titterton. “Once you learn the science of it, you can move on to the art part of it.”

Other options

If tempering chocolate isn’t something you want to tackle, there are plenty of other avenues via which to craft pretty, tasty treats.

“One of the simplest things to do is dip (foods like fruit and cookies) in melted chocolate and eat it right away. That way you don’t have to worry about tempering the chocolate,” suggests Titterton.



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Chocolate must be processed at a very precise temperature in order to produce consistently small cocoa butter crystals, which ensures a uniform sheen and good snap.

Another option: Wilton’s Candy Melts®. Ideal for molding, dipping or coating, the creamy candy wafers can be melted in the microwave, in a double boiler, in a slow cooker or in a bowl on a warming tray. Candy Melts® come in every color of the rainbow and several flavors, including cocoa.

If you prefer an entirely kitchen-free experience, pop down to the Clark College retail bakery, located in Gaiser Hall, and score a box of six or 12 chocolates for your sweetie. (With truffles filled with the lovely likes of strawberries and cream, banana, passion fruit with raspberry and pralines, you might want to pick yourself up a box, too.)

Resources

Chocolate Manufacturers Association: 703-790-5011, www.chocolateusa.org

Clark College Culinary Arts: 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver, 360-992-2220, www.clark.edu

The Decorette Shop: 5338 S.E. Foster Road, Portland, 503-774-3760, 800-728-CAKE. The store’s next chocolate making class (cherry cordials and chocolate truffles) will be held on March 15. Tuition is \$25, payable at registration. The fee includes all supplies. Students will take a box of chocolates they made home with them. Call the store for more information.

International Cocoa Organization: www.icco.org ♦