



Chocolate treats sweet way to please friends

ANYONE who knows me shares the knowledge of my weakness for indulging in chocolate.

I love it baked into cakes, chipped into cookies, glazed into frostings and melted into molds. There is, however, one type of chocolate that just sends me into chocoholic oblivion: gift chocolate.

This holiday season, I'll be spending a few days in my kitchen preparing gifts for the many family and friends that can be appreciated and swooned over. Let's face it, Godiva is great, but something from the home and heart — no matter what — made with love is always more appreciated.

Of course, my problem deals with the "One for you, one for me" adage that is sure to have me visiting my local



chef Larry Janes

eat gym for yet another month. Ah, but along with the good . . .

A FEW TIPS I would like to share before starting on the fun road to homemade chocolate-making are simple and easy to follow. If you plan to be preparing some tricky eye-appearing arrangement of chocolate that will be treasured as much as a 12-year-old bottle of Scotch, start with some tempered chocolate.

Tempering of chocolate consists of heating and cooling the chocolate through continuous mixing to ensure the development of stable cocoa butter crystals distributed evenly throughout the mass of chocolate. This assures a chocolate with great texture and a uniform glossy texture.

You can buy chocolate already tempered, but any simple candy-making book can show you the procedure to do it yourself. Tempered chocolate should always be used for dipping.

I have found it very helpful to have on hand a good (and I stress good) chocolate or candy-making thermometer. Went through the checkout at my local grocery and picked up a candy thermometer for \$3.49 and ruined a batch of peanut brittle. You get what you pay for.

A good all-purpose candy thermometer will cost about \$10 but will give you a lifetime of accuracy.

When the recipe calls for an addition of butter, use only unsalted butter. Period. Trust me on this one: the lightly salted variety can easily mask the taste of delicate chocolate.

If the recipe calls for butter at room temperature, and you have to take it out of the fridge, simply grate the butter on a grater or with the shredder back of a good processor. Your butter will be at room temperature in about five minutes.

Please try to melt butter in your microwave, remembering that it is very hot and gives you a chance to cool down. The addition of hot, melted butter into a delicate chocolate recipe can result in grainy chocolate, so be careful.

MAMA ALWAYS taught me to temper chocolate making only a cold, dry day. Seems that the added humidity in the air will cause your chocolate to set differently. Talk to any professional chocolate maker, and he will agree.

For safety's sake, and for financial reasons, it's best never to double or triple recipes. Chocolate is a bit finicky and when doubled, can scorch easily and when divided can become grainy.

Gifts of homemade chocolate are doubly appreciated because the recipient of the gift recognized the effort of the giver in each taste of the gift. Chocolate making can be as rewarding as the enjoyment of family and friends can be.

Try these great chocolate recipes, and let me know you enjoyed them.

MILLION DOLLAR FUDGE

6 ounces semisweet chocolate
1 cup marshmallow creme
2 cups sugar
1 tablespoon butter, room temperature
3/4 cup evaporated milk
dash salt
1 teaspoon pure vanilla
2 cups chopped nuts

Chop the chocolate into small pieces and place in a pan with the marshmallow creme. Set aside.

In a heavy saucepan, combine the sugar and milk, mix well. Gradually bring to a boil, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Boil and stir for five minutes

without touching the sides of the pan. Pour over chocolate and add salt and vanilla. Stir until smooth. Stir in nuts. Spread into lightly greased nine-inch square pan. Let stand until firm. Makes 36 pieces.

CHOCOLATE DIVINITY

6 ounces semisweet chocolate
2 cups sugar
1/2 cup water
1/2 cup syrup
dash salt
2 egg whites
1 teaspoon vanilla

Chop chocolate fine. Set aside. In a heavy saucepan, mix the sugar, water, corn syrup and salt over low heat until the sugar dissolves. Cook the mixture without stirring to 262 degrees F on a candy thermometer. Beat the egg whites until stiff. When the syrup reaches the proper temperature, pour it over the whites, beating constantly. Add the vanilla, beat until the mixture loses its gloss and holds peaks. Fold in the finely chopped chocolate. Drop by teaspoon onto a lightly greased waxed parchment paper. Makes 30.

TURTLES

1 1/2 pounds semisweet chocolate
8 ounces caramels
2 tablespoons whipping cream
1/2 pounds pecan halves

Temper the chocolate and set aside. In the top of a double boiler, melt the caramels with the cream. Arrange pecan pieces on a lightly buttered baking sheet to form individual turtles. Spoon a tablespoon of the melted caramel over the nuts, leaving the tips uncovered. Let stand for 30 minutes. Dip the caramel piece into the melted tempered chocolate. Place on a baking sheet to set. Make 24.

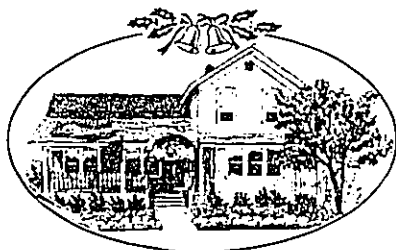
CHOCOLATE FUDGE SAUCE

1/2 cup unsalted butter at room temperature
1 cup unsweetened Dutch cocoa
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed
dash salt
1 cup whipping cream
1 teaspoon pure vanilla
1 tablespoon cognac or brandy

In a heavy saucepan, add all ingredients except the vanilla and cognac. Whisk over low heat, the bring to a boil and boil for one minute. Cool. Stir in vanilla and cognac. Sauce can be served warm or room temperature. Store in the fridge. Leftovers can be reheated. Makes 2 1/2 cups.

Larry Janes is a food columnist for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. His column appears every Monday in the Taste section.

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