

Now anyone can make fine chocolate candies

For many people, dessert is chocolate — everything from creamy chocolate mousse to gigantic cookies studded with chocolate chips to thin, intensely flavored chocolate lozenges.

But, most luscious of all to many a chocoholic are chocolate confections. Childhood's delights are chocolate bars and chocolate-covered peanuts. Adulthood, however, favors more subtle treats in which the quality of the ingredients is primary, and the texture of the chocolate — be it bittersweet or milk — comes through loud and clear.

FINE, FRESH chocolate should be shiny (the whitening some chocolate displays, called "bloom," indicates that the chocolate has melted, at least partially, and then resolidified, for a loss of both texture and flavor).

The sheen also indicates high proportion of cocoa butter in the chocolate's make-up — an important point, since inferior chocolates, made with the other fats, simply do not provide the same amount of gustatory pleasure.

The fragrance of chocolate also indicates its quality. The stronger and headier the chocolate aroma, the better the chocolate will be when eaten.

EVERYONE, OF course, has his own favorite chocolates from the myriad of chocolate-producing countries; some of the most important are Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Great Britain and the United States.

And, of course, you should be guided

by your palate when selecting chocolate.

But, it cannot be stressed too strongly that it is just as important, if not more so, to select high-quality chocolate for cooking as for eating out of hand. For, the best recipe will lose savor if made with less than top-quality chocolate.

The recipe below for Classic Truffles — perhaps the most quintessentially chocolate of all chocolate confections — is reproduced from "Sweet Seduction" (Harper Colophon Books) by Adrienne Welch, a New York pastry chef and truffle-maker, whose confections have won her enthusiastic praise.

THE "GANACHE" Welch refers to in her instructions is, in Welch's words, the truffle's "creamy chocolate heart." Because these truffles are rolled in cocoa powder and not coated with tempered couverture chocolate, a procedure of some difficulty, they are an ideal starting point for the novice truffle-maker, who may then want to go on to the other, more complex truffle recipes in Welch's book.

CLASSIC TRUFFLES

Filling
 1/2 cup heavy cream
 1 vanilla bean, cut in half
 A few grains of salt
 8 oz. bittersweet chocolate, in 1-inch pieces
 1 oz. milk chocolate, in 1-inch pieces
 2 egg yolks
 1 1/2 tbsp. dark rum or liqueur
Coating
 1 1/2 cups unsweetened cocoa

Combine the heavy cream, vanilla bean, and salt in a small saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a gentle boil.

Remove from the heat and allow to cool 5 minutes.

While the cream is heating, melt the chocolate in a heavy 2-quart saucepan, stirring frequently with a rubber spatula. Set aside.

Strain the hot cream through a fine sieve into a small mixing bowl.

Whisk in the egg yolks and melted chocolate. Add the dark rum or liqueur and blend until smooth.

Place the bowl of ganache in ice water, making sure that the water cannot slosh into the mixture. Stir constantly with a rubber spatula until the ganache is very thick and completely cool — about 15 minutes.

Immediately whip the ganache in an electric mixer, using a paddle attachment if you have one, until it lightens in color and forms soft peaks, about 15 to 20 seconds.

Do not overbeat or the mixture will harden too quickly and the texture of the truffle will be grainy.

* Line a baking sheet with foil. Fit a pastry bag with a number 8 round tube.

To shape the truffles, spoon half the ganache into the pastry bag. Pipe 6-inch long cylinders onto the baking sheet. Refill the pastry bag and continue to pipe.

Refrigerate for 10 minutes to harden the truffles.

Slice the cylinders into 1 1/2-inch pieces. Lightly dust the truffles with 1 1/2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa.

With your fingertips, form each piece into an irregularly shaped 1-inch ball. Roll the truffles in cocoa and store.

CHOCOLATE NUT Caramels and **Chocolate Divinity** are from the recently published volume, "Chocolate Crazy" (Macmillan Publishing Co.) by Sylvia Baler Hirsch, better known in the culinary world as "Miss Grimble," the purveyor of a wide array of fine desserts through her renowned Manhattan bakery.

CHOCOLATE NUT CARAMELS

8-inch square pan, buttered
 1 cup sugar
 1 cup packed dark brown sugar
 1 cup light corn syrup
 1 cup sweetened condensed milk
 1/2 cup light cream
 1 cup milk
 6 squares (6 oz.) bitter chocolate
 2 tsp. butter
 2 tsp. vanilla
 Pinch salt
 1 1/2 cups chopped walnuts or pecans

In a saucepan, combine the sugars, corn syrup, condensed milk, cream, and milk, and cook slowly, stirring con-

stantly, until the sugars are dissolved.

In the top of a double boiler over hot water, melt the chocolate and add to the sugar mixture with the butter. Cook slowly, stirring constantly, until the temperature on a candy thermometer reaches 245 degrees.

Remove from heat, and add vanilla, salt and nuts. Blend and pour into prepared pan and cool.

When firm, turn out on a board and cut into squares. Wrap each square in wax paper.

Makes 2 1/2 pounds.

CHOCOLATE DIVINITY

2 1/2 cups sugar
 1/2 cup light corn syrup
 1/2 cup water
 1/4 tsp. salt
 2 egg whites
 2 squares (2 oz.) bitter chocolate, melted and cooled
 1 tsp. vanilla
 1 cup chopped pecans

In a saucepan, combine the sugar,

corn syrup, water and salt. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a boil.

Reduce the heat and cook without stirring until the temperature on a candy thermometer reaches 245 degrees — the firm-ball stage.

Just one minute before this temperature is reached, beat the egg whites on a large platter until stiff.

Pour half of the syrup mixture over the beaten whites, mixing, beating constantly until blended. Cook the remaining syrup to 272 degrees — the thread stage on the candy thermometer.

Add the hot syrup mixture to the first mixture, 1 teaspoonful at a time, beating well after each addition with an electric beater. At the last addition, beat about 5 minutes.

Add the melted chocolate, vanilla, and nuts. Beat until the mixture loses its gloss and holds its shape when dropped from a spoon — about 5 minutes more. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto wax paper.

Makes 1 1/4 pounds.

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Casseroles save leftovers

The casserole is the busy cook's helper because most often the preparations can be completed ahead of time.

What I like about the casserole is that it's a great way to dispose of leftovers.

You've got ham and potatoes left from yesterday's dinner. You're halfway there already. You can make a simple cheese sauce, combine everything and less than an hour later, thanks to the casserole, dinner is ready.

There's a variety of casseroles: meat, poultry, vegetable, shellfish. All you have to do is make up your mind which to cook in a carefree manner.

HAM-CHEESE-POTATO CASSEROLE

1 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
 1/2 cup light cream
 2 cups diced cooked potatoes
 2 cups cubed cooked ham
 2 tbsp. chopped pimiento

Preheat oven at 350 degrees. Heat cheese and cream in medium saucepan on medium heat, constantly stirring until cheese is melted and sauce is smooth. Remove from heat, stir in rest of ingredients, pour into ungreased 1 1/2-quart casserole, cover with foil and bake 45 minutes. Serves 4-5.

CRAB MEAT-MACARONI CASSEROLE

2 cans (6 oz.) lump crab meat, drained
 1/2 cup margarine
 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
 1 1/2 tsp. salt
 1 tsp. paprika
 1/2 tsp. black pepper
 1 tsp. instant minced onion
 3/4 cups milk
 1 1/2 cups macaroni, cooked as directed and drained
 1 can (6 oz.) sliced mushrooms, drained
 1/2 cup sherry
 1 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese

Flake crab meat with fork and set aside. Melt margarine in medium saucepan, remove from heat and stir in flour, salt, paprika and pepper. Add onion and gradually stir in milk. Bring sauce to boil, stirring, reduce heat to medium low, simmer 5 minutes and remove from heat. Preheat oven at 350 degrees. Combine crab meat, macaroni, mushrooms and sherry with sauce, mix well and turn into ungreased 2-quart casserole. Top with cheese. Bake 20 minutes. Serves 6-8.

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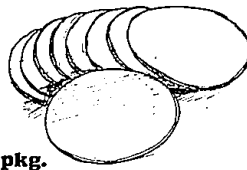
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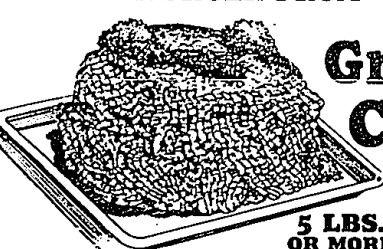


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