

Where does chocolate come from? Actually, it DOES grow on trees

It all starts with a small tropical tree, the *Theobroma cacao*, usually called simply, “cacao.” (Pronounced ka-KOW. *Theobroma* is Greek for “food of the gods.”) Cacao is native to Central and South America, but it is grown commercially throughout the tropics. About 70% of the world’s cacao is grown in Africa.

A cacao tree can produce close to two thousand pods per year. The ridged, football shaped pod, or fruit, of the cacao grows from the branches and, oddly, straight out of the trunk. The pods, which mature throughout the year, encase a sticky white pulp and about 30 or 40 seeds. The pulp is both sweet and tart; it is eaten and used in making drinks. The seeds, were you to bite into one straight out of the pod, are incredibly bitter. Not at all like the chocolate that comes from them.

It’s actually a perfect design. The fruit attracts forest animals, like monkeys, who eat the fruit but cast the seeds aside, dispersing them and allowing new trees to sprout up.

The pods are harvested by hand. Next comes fermentation. The beans, still sticky with pulp, are placed in earthen pits or wooden bins and covered with banana leaves, then left to ferment. The heat of fermentation changes the bitter flavors in the beans into something more edible.

After fermentation, the beans are dried in the sun for about a week. The flavor continues to develop during this time.

Once the beans are dry, they are ready to be shipped to a factory, where they are turned into chocolate.

Chocolate History: Who Invented Chocolate?

Chocolate history starts out in Latin America, where cacao trees grow wild. The first people to use chocolate were probably the Olmec.

We do know, however, that the Mayan people did use chocolate. It is with the Mayan people that chocolate history really begins.

The cacao beans were used as currency. 10 beans would buy you a rabbit or a prostitute. 100 beans would buy you a slave.

The Mayans prepared chocolate strictly for drinking. Chocolate history doesn't include solid chocolate until the 1850s. Usually only the rich drank chocolate.

As the supply increased, prices went down, and chocolate became increasingly available to the commoner.

Chocolate History Firms Up

In the 1850s, Englishman Joseph Fry started adding more cocoa butter, rather than hot water, to cocoa powder and sugar. The world's first solid chocolate was born.

In 1875, Daniel Peter and Henri Nestle added condensed milk to solid chocolate, creating a milk chocolate bar.

In 1879, a Swiss gentleman, Rudolphe Lindt invented the conch, a machine that rotated and mixed chocolate to a perfectly smooth consistency.

By 1907, Milton Hershey's factory was making over 33 million Hershey's kisses per day.

Unsweetened Chocolate

Pure chocolate without added sugar.

Also known as: bitter chocolate, baking chocolate, chocolate liquor, and pure chocolate.

Uses: Used almost exclusively for baking

Bittersweet Chocolate

Legally, at least 35 percent pure chocolate, with some small amount of sugar added.

Also known as: dark chocolate, when it is a European brand.

Uses: Baking and eating.

Semisweet Chocolate

Legally, at least 35 percent pure chocolate with added cocoa butter and sugar.

Uses: Baking and eating.

Milk Chocolate

Legally, milk chocolate is at least 10 percent pure chocolate and at least 12% milk solids, with added cocoa butter and sugar.

Milder flavor than darker chocolates.

Uses: eating and candy

Unsweetened Cocoa Powder

Unsweetened cocoa powder is pure chocolate with most of the cocoa butter removed.

Uses: baking and hot chocolate mixes

Sweet Baking Chocolate

Legally, sweet chocolate is at least 15 percent pure chocolate with added cocoa butter and sugar.

Example: Sweet German chocolate

White Chocolate

White chocolate is made by combining at least 20% cocoa butter with sugar, at least 14 % milk solids, and flavoring, usually vanilla.

Others:

Candy Coating

Also known as: Compound chocolate coating, chocolate summer coating, confectioners' coating chocolate, and chocolate-flavored coating.

It is easier to work with than chocolate for dipping and molding since there is no need to take special steps with it to get a shine to it and it melts at a higher temperature.

Comes in assorted colors and flavors.

Mexican Chocolate

Mexican sweet chocolate has cinnamon and sugar added to the pure chocolate. Sometimes ground almonds may also be added.

Characteristics of Quality Chocolate

- **Glossy shine** indicates that it has been properly stored, around 65 degrees F. When chocolate melts and re-solidifies, the cocoa butter rises to the top, causing "bloom." It may look off, but changes the taste and texture only slightly.
- **Snap**
- **Aroma**
- **Texture:** When talking about food in your mouth, texture is referred to as "mouth feel." The mouth feel of good chocolate should be smooth, not grainy, not waxy. It should melt in your mouth.
- **Taste:** In the end, this is what will determine for you which chocolate is right. Every manufacturers' chocolate is different based on a combination of many factors including where the cacao beans come from, how they are roasted, and the balance of cocoa butter, sugar, and pure chocolate.

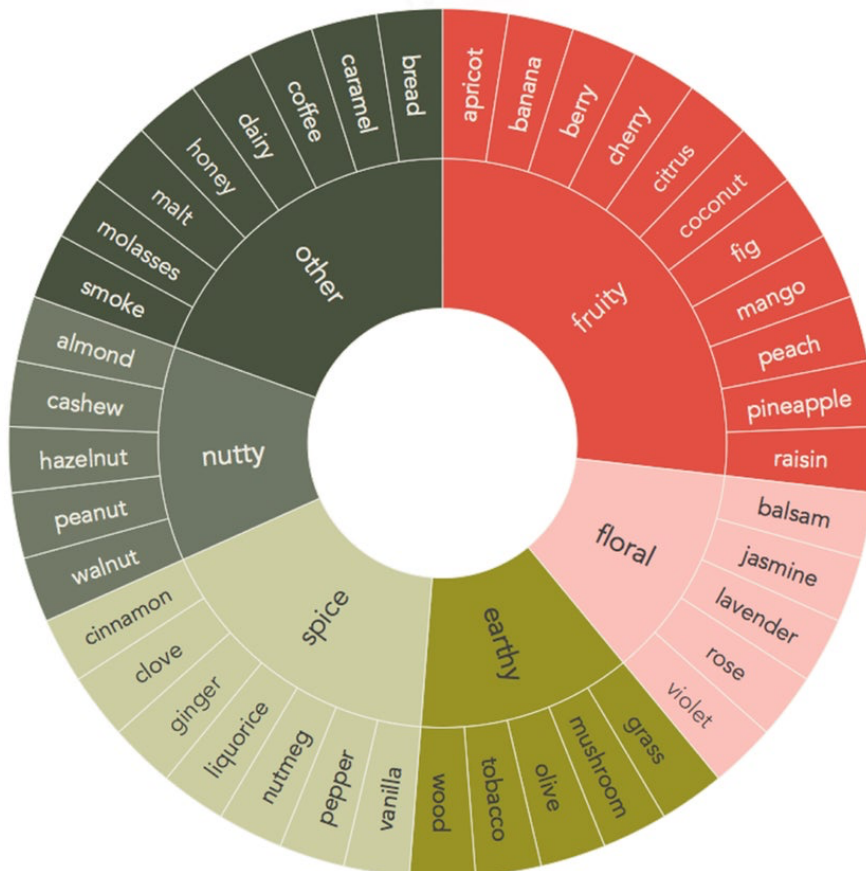
Storing Chocolate

- Store in a tightly covered container or sealed plastic bag. Chocolate's porous nature allows it to pick up flavor from other items.
- Temperature should be around 65 degrees F.
- Humidity should be no more than 50 percent.
- Stored as stated above, it will keep one year.



HOW TO "TASTE" CHOCOLATE

- 1. TEST THE TEMP** - Avoid cold chocolate; the flavor is masked. Let your chocolate reach room temperature before tasting.
- 2. CLEANSE YOUR PALATE** - Drink room temperature water between samples to cleanse the palate.
- 3. LOOK** - Look at the appearance of the chocolate. Chocolates vary in color from rich reds and coppers to dark browns. Look at the appearance of the surface - is it glossy, shiny, dull, mottled, waxy, discolored?
- 4. TOUCH** - Run your fingers across the surface, and consider the texture. It should feel silky, not sticky, waxy or gritty and should just begin to melt to the warmth of your finger.
- 5. SMELL** - Take a small piece and let it melt between your forefinger and thumb, cup your hands around the chocolate and then smell. There are many associated aromas and you can start to recognize them. Rich? Sweet? Earthy? Nutty? Is it floral, fruity? Do you smell dairy, caramel or malt, toasted nuts, coffee, dried fruit or hints or tropical fruit, wine, flowers, or wood?
- 6. SNAP** - Break a piece in half - it should snap cleanly. The lower the cacao content the less snap.
- 7. TASTE** - Place the chocolate on your tongue and press it gently to the roof of your mouth. Let it melt slowly, allowing the cocoa butter to slowly coat the taste buds. After this, try chewing once or twice to further release the flavors.
- 8. EVALUATE (AND ENJOY)** - Study how the aroma and flavor of the chocolate come together: bitter? sweet? light? heavy? Consider how these factors, along with the texture, evolve as the chocolate melts. After the chocolate is gone, think of how the flavor has lingered or if it has a quick finish.
- 9. REPEAT!** - Taste a variety of chocolates to discover the difference and find your favorites.



List of Chocolates Tasted

DARK

- 1 – Ghirardelli Intense Dark 86% cacao
- 2 – El Rey Sur del Lago 70% cacao
- 3 – El Rey Bucare 58.5% cacao
- 4 – Sam's Choice Smooth Dark Chocolate Bites
- 5 – Dove Dark Chocolate Promises

MILK

- 6 – Sam's Choice Smooth Milk Chocolate Bites
- 7 – Lindt Classic Recipe Milk Chocolate
- 8 – Cadbury Milk Chocolate
- 9 – Dove Milk Chocolate Promises
- 10 – Hershey's Milk Chocolate

WHITE

- 11 – Lindt Classic Recipe White Chocolate
- 12 – Ghirardelli White Chocolate