

Chapter 8



Chocolate!
Choosing and Using Chocolate

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Chocolate!

Part 1: Chocolate Types

This is the eighth and final chapter. If you're a chocoholic, you'll love this chapter. You'll learn about cocoa and the kinds of chocolate we use in baking. You'll learn how to add chocolate and convert some of your favorite recipes to a chocolate desserts. You'll learn how to make ganache for fillings and frosting. And of course, you'll learn to make a chocolate fudge cake.

Overview

To many of us, the differences in the array of available chocolates are a mystery. (What's the difference between bittersweet and semisweet chocolate?) We'll explain those differences so that you will be able to choose the best chocolate for the project at hand.

All chocolate is derived from cacao beans. There are three varieties of cocoa plants, each with its own characteristics. Most quality chocolate is produced from the combination of beans from these three plants. Even among these three varieties, there are differences based on regions and soils. Producers seek the best beans and prize and guard their formulas. There is an alchemy that goes into the balancing and blending of beans to achieve the complex, smooth flavors that we love.

The differences in fine chocolate appeal to different tastes just as in wines. Try a number of different chocolates and decide which you like the best. All chocolates are not the same. Personally, I'm not so particular about the chocolate that is mixed into the batter for a chocolate cake but I do like a first quality chocolate in a chocolate chunk cookie, a chocolate coating, or a quality chocolate frosting.

Processing

Cacao beans are picked by hand. While different companies have different processes, generally the beans are roasted first. After roasting, the nibs, or kernels, slip easily from the skins. It is from these nibs that all chocolate products are derived.

If cocoa is produced, the nibs are then ground and pressed to remove the cocoa butter. The cocoa butter is retained for other chocolate products while the remaining powder is sieved and processed into the cocoa we find on the store shelves.

To make baking chocolate, the nibs are ground and made into a paste called chocolate liquor. (The term does not refer to alcoholic liquor.) The chocolate liquor contains the light colored fat, cocoa butter. Using their own formulas and processes, producers add sugar, milk solids, lecithin, and flavors to make different products.

Cocoa

There are two types of cocoa. Natural cocoa is somewhat acidic. Because it is acidic, it can be used with baking soda, an alkaline, to create a chemical reaction and carbon dioxide bubbles for leavening. Dutch cocoa or dutch processed cocoa is processed with alkali so that it is no longer acidic but is slightly alkaline and will not react with baking soda. It is darker and because it tends to have less cocoa butter than natural cocoa, dissolves more easily and is smoother in flavor.

You can purchase either in grocery stores. If the recipe does not specify a type of cocoa, you will need to determine which is best. If the recipe is relying on baking soda for leavening, you will need natural cocoa unless there is another acid—like sour cream or buttermilk—in the recipe.

Natural cocoa is reddish in color and your cake or cookies may turn out brown or reddish brown instead of the desired dark chocolate color. You can make the product darker by adding baking soda to neutralize the acid—one-half teaspoon to one teaspoon in most recipes.

The Baking Chocolates

Bitter (unsweetened) chocolate is made from pure chocolate liquor. By specification, it must contain 50 to 58 percent cocoa butter though with inferior products, vegetable oil may be added. Depending on the producer, milk solids, vanilla, or salt may be added. I have a package in front of me that contains only chocolate and milk solids.

Unsweetened chocolate has a bitter taste and relies on sweeteners in the recipe to make it palatable.

Sweet chocolate-- bittersweet, semisweet chocolate--has sugar added. These products must contain 35 to 50% cocoa butter but may have as little as 15% chocolate liquor. Because unsweetened chocolate has twice the chocolate liquor, we prefer to use unsweetened chocolate in most of our baking.

Bittersweet and semisweet chocolate can be used interchangeably in recipes though there is a difference in flavor. Often, bittersweet is a more expensive chocolate and to many, a better, richer-flavored chocolate.

Milk chocolate is made with ten percent chocolate liquor. It contains a minimum of twelve percent milk solids. Because it has such a low percentage of chocolate liquor, rarely is it melted and added to batter or dough.

White chocolate contains no chocolate liquor but is made with cocoa butter. Historically, the FDA has not regulated the manufacture of white chocolate so you need to read labels carefully. If the product was made with vegetable oil instead of cocoa butter, it will not perform the same as a product with cocoa butter.

Chocolate chips are made with chocolate liquor with only minimal amounts of cocoa butter. Instead, they are made with vegetable oil and stabilizers to help them hold their

shape. Without the cocoa butter, chocolate chips have a different taste and mouth feel. Chocolate chips will have a firmer set in puddings, pie fillings, and sauces than baking chocolate.

Storing Chocolate

Because chocolate contains cocoa butter, it will eventually become rancid as other fats do. In ideal conditions, chocolate with low milk solids content will last for two years while those with milk solids tend to go rancid more quickly.

The ideal storage temperature for chocolate is 65 degrees. Exposure to light accelerates deterioration.

Fluctuating temperatures cause a condition called “bloom” (either fat bloom or sugar bloom) to occur which appears as filmy white streaks on the surface of the chocolate. It does not affect the chocolate for baking purposes though it may for candy making purposes.

Chocolate will readily absorb kitchen odors. Keep chocolate in sealed containers or wrapped tightly and away from odorous foods.

Questions and Answers about Chocolate

What is bloom and does it hurt the chocolate?

Bloom is that white frosted look that chocolate sometimes gets in storage. It is bits of cocoa butter on the surface of the chocolate that is often caused by temperature fluctuations in storage or transit. For baking purposes, the chocolate is unaffected.

Can I substitute chocolate chips for baker's chocolate in a recipe?

Unsweetened baking chocolate is much too intense to be used interchangeably with chocolate chips, even semisweet chips.

It is true that melted semisweet chocolate chips will have a little different flavor and intensity than melted semisweet baking chocolate but in our experience, you can substitute the chips for the chocolate. Use 1/3 cup of unmelted chocolate chips as a substitute for two ounces of baking chocolate.

What makes good chocolate, good?

Chocolate is a proprietary product with each producer having its own process usually shrouded with secrecy. Accordingly, there is a great deal of difference in brands with the better quality brands usually offering better chocolates. Try different chocolates to find the ones that you love.

Cocoa butter is critical to good chocolate. Usually, you'll want to avoid any chocolate product that has added fat, usually listed on the label as hydrogenated fat. That means that they are substituting vegetable fat for the cocoa butter. While other fat is sometimes added to coating chocolates to alter handling characteristics, you'll be happier with a pure product in your baking.

Is white chocolate really chocolate?

That depends on the product and your definition of chocolate. The FDA does not recognize or regulate the term "white chocolate" as it does other chocolate products. White chocolate does not contain cocoa solids. It should contain cocoa butter along with sugar, flavors, and milk solids. Be aware of lesser products that do not use cocoa butter. Even more so than in dark chocolate, there is a great difference in quality in those products labeled white chocolate or vanilla chips.

Part 2: Using Chocolate

In this section, we will cover how to use chocolate from melting to substituting. Since we love chocolate, we often add chocolate to recipe to make a new chocolate dessert. You'll learn how to do that in this section.

Melted Chocolate

Many recipes call for melted chocolate. Melted chocolate is also used in candy making, in molding, in dipping, and in decorating. This section deals with these uses.

You can melt chocolate on the stovetop or in the microwave. We recommend using the microwave. If you choose to melt your chocolate on the stove, use a double boiler.

To melt your chocolate in the microwave, place the chips or wafers in a microwave safe bowl. If you are melting baking chocolate that has been formed into blocks, chop the chocolate into bits before melting.

Microwave the chocolate for one minute not on a high setting but on a medium or lower setting. The defrost setting works perfectly in most microwaves. Stir the chocolate and then microwave again for thirty seconds on the same setting. Continue doing this until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Do not overcook the chocolate.

To melt chocolate in a double boiler, partially fill the pan with water. The water should not touch the bottom of the top pan. Heat the water on a low setting and do not let it boil. Place the chocolate in the top pan. It will slowly begin to melt. As it does, stir the chocolate periodically until it is melted and smooth.

Always use clean, dry containers for melting chocolate. Any water or moisture will cause melted chocolate to go lumpy and thick. If your melted chocolate is too thick, add vegetable oil to thin the chocolate.

Molded Chocolate

Once melted, you can pour chocolate into almost any mold. You can buy molds (the figures on the right were molded using a pan available on our site) or you can be creative and use other containers for molds.

Fill the molds one-third full then add nuts, melted caramel, marshmallows, dried fruit, or more. Then fill the mold with the remaining chocolate. Tap the mold on the counter to eliminate any voids. The chocolate will set in about fifteen minutes. Once set, the candies will release easily.



You can use an ice cube tray to make chocolates. A plastic ice cube tray with individual compartments is perfect. Fill each compartment one-third full with melted chocolate. Then place nuts, nougat candy, peanut butter, or melted caramel on the top of the chocolate. Finally, finish filling the compartments with melted chocolate.

Use any of the following ingredients alone or combined for an array of homemade gourmet chocolates:

- Walnuts
- Almonds
- Peanuts
- Pecans
- Pistachios
- Dried Cranberries
- Dried Apples
- Dates
- Maraschino Cherries (keep refrigerated)
- Fresh Fruit (keep refrigerated)
- Bananas (keep refrigerated)
- Mini Marshmallows
- Peanut Butter
- Caramel (melted candies, apple dipping caramel, ice cream topping)
- Your favorite jam or jelly
- Coconut
- Rice Cereal
- Toffee Bits or Chunks
- Marshmallow Cream
- Fudge Bits or Chunks

Fondue and Dipping Chocolate

You can dip fruit, cookies, cake squares, pretzels, or anything else in melted chocolate. You can melt the chocolate in a double boiler. The hot water in the pan will keep the chocolate melted while you dip. A fondue pot works even better. At your next party, let guests dip strawberries, cherries, or pineapple or banana chunks in the chocolate. Use a skewer or fondue fork to hold the fruit to be dipped.



For a special treat, put half a banana on a stick, dip the banana in chocolate, and then roll the banana in chopped peanuts.

Toppings and Drizzles

You can pour melted chocolate over brownies or cakes to make a great icing. If you would like a softer topping instead of a hard shell, add a bit of vegetable oil to your chocolate.

It's easy to drizzle a little chocolate (or frosting) on your cookies, cakes, or pastries.

Place one-half cup chocolate chips in a small heavy-duty plastic bag. Microwave the bag and chips for 40 seconds on medium heat. Knead the chips to mix the melted chips through those that are not melted. Microwave again for 10 to 15 seconds or until the chips are completely melted.



Cut a tiny corner from the plastic bag and squeeze a narrow stream of chocolate through the cut corner. You'll quickly get the knack and be able to create decorative patterns of your choice. You can use the same technique with frosting.

The cookies shown are Buttery Shortbread Cookies drizzled with chocolate.

Making Substitutions

Now that you know the composition of chocolate products and the characteristics of each, you may wish to substitute one for another. Additionally, you may wish to add chocolate to a recipe, to convert that favorite yellow cake to a chocolate cake recipe, for example. This section will help you make those changes. Since every recipe is different, consider these as guidelines and realize that some fine tuning may be necessary for the perfect product.

Adding Cocoa to a Recipe

Because cocoa contains starch, it absorbs moisture. Consequently, when you add cocoa to a recipe, you must reduce the flour. Reduce the amount of flour by 1/3 cup for each 1/2 cup of cocoa.

How much cocoa should you add? Obviously, tastes vary. A starting point is to look at other recipes, especially those that you have tried and like. Look at the ratio of flour to cocoa and use the same ratio in your recipe.

Adding Baking Chocolate to a Recipe

If you add baking chocolate to a recipe, you will not need to make adjustments in the amount of flour. We recommend adding unsweetened chocolate since the adjustments are easier.

If you add two ounces of unsweetened baking chocolate, you will be introducing about two tablespoons of cocoa butter. You may wish to reduce the butter or oil in the recipe by a commensurate amount. No other changes are required.

Using Cocoa in Place of Baking Chocolate

If you choose to use cocoa in place of unsweetened baking chocolate, use three tablespoons of cocoa plus one tablespoon of vegetable oil for every one ounce of unsweetened baking chocolate. (Six tablespoons of cocoa equals 1/3 cup plus two teaspoons. Nine tablespoons equals 1/2 cup plus one tablespoon.)

For one ounce of sweet baking chocolate, use one tablespoon of cocoa plus two teaspoons of vegetable oil plus one tablespoon and 1/2 teaspoon of sugar.

Using Baking Chocolate in Place of Cocoa

Two and two-thirds ounces of unsweetened chocolate replaces 1/2 cup cocoa. Reduce the vegetable oil or butter by two to three tablespoons since unsweetened chocolate contains cocoa butter.

Because sweet chocolate has relatively less chocolate liquor and because of the differences in composition between types and brands of sweet chocolate, substituting sweet chocolate for cocoa is a bit more challenging. For one half cup cocoa, it will take six to eight ounces of sweet chocolate. That much sweet chocolate will add a lot of sugar. For eight ounces of chocolate, reduce the sugar by 1/2 cup and one tablespoon. The sweet chocolate will also add fat to the recipe. For eight ounces of chocolate, reduce the fat by 1/3 cup.

Part 3: Using Chocolate in Recipes

Ganache

Ganache (pronounced “gah nahsh”) is a rich, chocolate and cream filling for many uses. In its simplest form, it is a mixture of heavy cream and chocolate only but butter and other flavors are often added. It can be thick or thin depending on the ratio of chocolate to cream with high chocolate ratios resulting in a thicker, semi-solid ganache.

Ganache is simple to make. Usually ganache is made by boiling cream and adding chocolate. In the hot cream, the chocolate melts and the ganache thickens as it cools.

Peanut Butter Sandwich Cookies with Ganache Filling

This is really a recipe for peanut butter yoyo cookies—thin peanut butter wafers sandwiched with a creamy chocolate filling. This recipe is bound to be a hit at your house. It’s one of our favorite recipes.



For the very best cookies, use a quality chocolate though good quality chocolate chips will make a fine cookie.

Ingredients

1/2 cup butter
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 large egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3/4 cup peanut butter

1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda

Directions

1. Cream the butter and sugars together with the paddle attachment of your mixer. Add the salt, egg, and vanilla and beat until smooth. Add the peanut butter and mix.
2. Add the flour and baking soda and beat until combined.
3. Refrigerate the dough for 20 minutes to firm up slightly.

4. Divide the dough into two portions. Using wax paper, roll each portion into logs 1 1/2-inches in diameter. Refrigerate for two hours or until firm.
5. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Cut cookies into slices just thicker than 1/4 inch. Place them on a greased baking sheet and bake 12 to 14 minutes or until the cookies just start to brown on the edges. Cool on a wire rack.

For the filling:

Mix 1/2 cup whipping cream, one tablespoons butter, and 2 tablespoons of light corn syrup in a heavy saucepan. Heat until it simmers. Remove the pan from the heat and immediately add six ounces of semisweet baking chocolate chopped into pieces. Stir until the chocolate is melted into a smooth sauce. The filling will thicken as it cools.

Chocolate Raspberry Sandwich Cookies

Chocolate and raspberry makes a wonderful combination. In this case, it makes a scrumptious filling to sandwich between two sugar cookies. The filling is simply a ganache made with raspberry jam.



This is a very nice recipe to add to your collection. You can make the sugar cookies alone, without the filling. You can make plain sandwich cookies as we have, or dress them up for a special occasion. For Valentine's Day, cut the cookies into hearts and decorate them with candies or colored sugar. For Christmas, cut them into stars or other shapes.

This is a rich sugar cookie recipe with just a bit of almond flavor. The filling is made with chocolate, raspberry jam, and cream. You can make the sugar cookies alone, without the filling. You can make plain sandwich cookies as we have, or dress them up for a special occasion. These are very good cookies.

Ingredients

1 cup butter
1 cup granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 large egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon almond extract

3 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder

3 tablespoons whipping cream

Directions

Mix the filling first and refrigerate it to keep it thick. Mix 1/4 cup whipping cream and 1 tablespoon of light corn syrup in a heavy saucepan. Heat until it simmers. Remove the pan from the heat and immediately add three ounces of semisweet baking chocolate chopped into pieces. Stir until the chocolate is melted into a smooth sauce. Add 1/2 cup raspberry jam and stir until smooth. The filling will thicken as it cools.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

1. Cream the butter, sugar, and salt together with the paddle attachment of your mixer. Add the eggs one at a time, beating after each. Beat for five or six minutes or until the mixture is light and lemon-colored. Add the extracts.
2. Mix the flour and baking powder together in another bowl. Add the flour mixture to the creamed mixture along with the cream. Mix until combined. Do not over mix. Refrigerate the dough for at least one hour.
3. Roll the dough to a thickness of 1/4-inch on a lightly floured countertop. Cut into shapes with a cookie cutter. Sprinkle with decorative sugars if desired.
4. Bake on an ungreased baking sheet for about 12 minutes or until done. (The edges will be very lightly browned.) Let the cookies cool on a wire rack.
5. Match up the cookies back-to-back in pairs. Spoon filling between the cookies to make sandwiches. Ganache is flavorful and a thin layer is sufficient. Store the cookies in a cool place.

Ganache for Frosting

It is the ratio of chocolate to cream that determines the consistency of ganache. For a thinner, ganache, add more cream and for a thicker ganache, add melted chocolate.

Be sure and use a good quality chocolate. Fresh cream is less likely to curdle than cream that has aged.

Ingredients

1 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon vanilla
8 ounces semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, cut into pieces
4 tablespoons butter



Directions

1. Bring the cream and vanilla to a boil.
2. In a medium bowl, pour the hot cream over the chocolate. Stir until the chocolate is melted.
3. Stir in the butter.
4. Let the ganache cool until it reaches a consistency for frosting.

This can also be made with one cup of semisweet chocolate chips though the lack of cocoa butter in the chocolate chips will affect the flavor. If you use chocolate chips, increase the butter to two tablespoons.

Making Chocolate Sauce

Homemade sauce is so much better than most of what you buy in the store. Maybe it's the ingredients, premium ingredients, without cutting corners to save a few cents. Maybe it's because it is fresher without stabilizers or preservatives. Maybe it's just because it's yours.

Creamy Hot Fudge Sauce

This is a great hot fudge sauce made with cream and fresh butter. No wonder it's good.

This is a great ganache-like, fudge sauce. It is thick and needs to be heated to be pourable. If you would like a little thinner sauce, add more cream.

Refrigerate this sauce. To reheat, place in the microwave for 15 to 30 seconds.

Ingredients

5 ounces unsweetened baking chocolate
1/2 cup granulated sugar
2/3 heavy cream
1/4 cup unsalted butter

Directions

Place the chocolate, sugar, and cream in a heavy saucepan. Bring to a boil, stirring frequently. Remove from the heat and stir in the butter. Serve warm over ice cream.



Making a Chocolate Fudge Cake

One of America's favorite desserts is a buttery chocolate cake layered with a fudge frosting. True fudge frosting is made with the same technique as chocolate fudge. It is simply spread on the cake before it becomes too set to spread.

Buttery Chocolate Cake with Fudge Frosting

In this recipe, we walk through the steps of making a layer cake and fudge frosting. There are a few tricks to successful fudge making. We'll share those tips. (If you can make chocolate fudge frosting, you can make chocolate fudge.)

If you like fudge, this cake recipe is for you. This makes a buttery chocolate cake spread with fudge frosting, the same type of fudge that you would buy at the neighborhood candy shop.

For the cake:

3 ounces unsweetened baking chocolate
1/2 cup butter
1 1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt

2 large eggs

2 1/4 cups cake flour
1/2 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda

3/4 cup milk

For the frosting:

3 cups granulated sugar
1/4 cup light corn syrup
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup cream
2 ounces unsweetened baking chocolate
1/4 cup unsalted butter
1 teaspoon vanilla



Directions

For the cake:

Prepare two nine-inch cake pans by greasing them and lining them with parchment or waxed paper. (Use the pan as a pattern and trace the outline on the paper before cutting the circles with your kitchen shears.)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

1. Melt the chocolate and set aside to cool to room temperature.
2. With the paddle attachment of an electric mixer, beat the butter at medium speed until it is smooth and creamy. Add the brown sugar and salt. Beat until it is light and fluffy.
3. Add the eggs one at a time, creaming after each. Beat at medium speed for eight to ten minutes or until it is light and fluffy. Add the melted chocolate.
4. Mix the flour, baking powder, and baking soda together.
5. Add about one-fourth of the dry ingredients to the creamed mixture. Mix until just combined. Do not over-stir or you may reduce the entrained air in the creamed mixture.
6. Add about one-third of the liquid ingredients and stir them in. Add another one-fourth of the dry ingredients to the creamed mixture and mix until just combined. Repeat with the dry and liquids ingredients until combined, ending with the dry ingredients.
7. Place in pans, smooth the tops, and bake immediately for 25 minutes at 350 degrees or until a toothpick stuck in the center of the cake comes out clean.
8. Cool for five to ten minutes in the pans. Remove the cakes to wire racks to cool completely. Frost after cooling.

For the frosting:

1. Coat the inside of a heavy saucepan with butter. The butter will help prevent sugar crystals from forming on the sides of the pan.
2. In the saucepan, mix the sugar, corn syrup, salt, and cream. Stir well to dissolve crystals. Add the chocolate.
3. Over medium heat, cook the mixture. Stir gently to keep from burning on the bottom of the pan. Try to avoid splashing onto the sides of the pan where crystals may form.
4. Cook to a temperature of 234 degrees. You will need a candy thermometer to monitor the heat. (If you do not have a thermometer, you may cook it until it is at the "soft ball" stage.) Remove from the heat and add the butter. Do not stir. Let the butter melt on the top of the candy mixture.
5. Let the candy cool until it reaches 110 degrees or the bottom of the pan is warm to the touch.
6. Beat the frosting with a spoon using an up and down motion until it is of a frosting consistency. Frost immediately.

Baker's note: The trick for making great fudge is to eliminate the sugar crystals and the resulting grainy texture. Crystals form in chains. A few crystals tend to generate crystals throughout the mixture. Make certain that the sugar is completely dissolved and that you do not reintroduce crystals by sticking a spoon back into the mixture with sugar crystals on it. A tablespoon of corn syrup will help prevent crystallization.

Refer to Chapter 7 about cooking sugar for more information about crystallization and how to avoid it.

Root Beer Chocolate Cake with Chocolate Butter Frosting

We had to slip this recipe in. It's such an interesting cake. We first made it for a family party, Grandma Maloney's birthday party. We were to bring the cakes. We couldn't bring just any cake so we started experimenting.

We had some root beer soda left over from our camping trip. Why not use that? The carbonation will create bubbles in the batter. We added buttermilk. Buttermilk is an acid and will react with soda, an alkaline creating additional leavening.



Three cakes later, we had a very good cake. It was surprisingly light and moist with just a hint of root beer flavor. We wanted it chocolaty but not so much that it overwhelmed the root beer flavor. This worked.

The cake got a thumbs up—from youngest to oldest. We have since experimented with other soda pop cakes leaving the chocolate out and trying different sodas. On our web site, you will find a spice cake made with soda pop. With these two recipes, you can try all kinds of cakes. Be sure to use soda pop with sugar in it, not sugar-free.

Ingredients

3/4 cup shortening
1 3/4 cups granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1/2 tablespoon vanilla extract

2 2/3 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 cup dutch-processed cocoa
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 cup buttermilk
1 12-ounce can root beer, not sugar-free

Directions

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease and dust with flour a 13 x 9-inch baking pan.

1. Cream the shortening and sugar together. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each. Beat for five or six minutes so that the mixture is light and fluffy. Add the vanilla.

2. In another bowl, mix the flour, cocoa, salt and soda together.
3. In three or four additions, add the dry ingredients and the liquids to the creamed mixture alternately starting and ending with the dry ingredients. (Each time that we made this, we added the buttermilk first then one half of the soda and finally, the rest of the soda.) Mix only until smooth.
4. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 35 to 40 minutes or until the cake tests done with a toothpick. Cool completely before frosting with the frosting of your choice.

Baker's Note: *When making a cake such as this, you are mixing oil (shortening) and water (soda pop and buttermilk)—which don't mix. The egg yolks act as an emulsifier, a bonding agent between the oil and water molecules and the flour absorbs much of the water. That is why you start with the flour addition—so that the water doesn't overload the fat mixture before the flour is there to start absorbing water. It's also why you add the liquids in stages between the flour additions.*

Chocolate Butter Frosting

We used this frosting for our Root Beer Chocolate Cake. It's a simple frosting that works well on any cake.

Ingredients

3/4 cup butter
about 5 cups powdered sugar
2 tablespoons milk
2 ounces unsweetened baking chocolate, melted and cooled
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Additional milk as required

Directions

Cream the butter. Add half the powdered sugar and two tablespoons milk. Gradually add the remaining powdered sugar, beating as you go. Add the vanilla and melted chocolate. Add more milk as required to reach a spreadable consistency.

Sweet Chocolate Braided Bread

While challah is a traditional bread baked for the Jewish Sabbath, it has become popular with everyone, everywhere. It's attractive and has a firm, egg-rich texture that works for dinner, sandwiches, or French toast. It is typically braided with three, four, or six strands of dough. (The braided strands are symbolic of love.)



Challah is really very easy to make. There is a sense of satisfaction in working the dough by hand and crafting such an attractive bread and it certainly will impress your guests.

In this version, we added chocolate for the dough and a chocolate cream cheese filling and then we drizzled the bread with a chocolate cream cheese glaze. It may not be real challah but it is absolutely scrumptious—maybe our best chocolate bread ever.

This recipe can be doubled.

Ingredients

3 to 3 1/2 cups bread flour
1 packet instant active dry yeast
3/4 cup water, heated to 110 degrees
1/3 cup brown sugar
1/3 cup cocoa
4 tablespoons butter
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 large egg at room temperature

For the filling

5 ounces cream cheese
1 ounce semi-sweet baking chocolate, melted
3 tablespoons granulated sugar
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 egg yolk
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/8 teaspoon nutmeg

Chocolate glaze directions follows.

Directions

1. Mix about one cup of the flour, the yeast, and the heated water until smooth. This will hydrate the instant yeast. If you are using other than instant yeast, hydrate the yeast separately.
2. Add the brown sugar, cocoa, butter, salt, and egg and mix. Add enough of the remaining bread flour to make a soft but not tacky dough. Knead until the gluten is developed, about four minutes with a stand-type mixer at medium speed. Set the dough in a greased bowl, cover, and let it stand until doubled, about one hour.
3. To make the filling, beat the cream cheese until soft and smooth. Add the melted chocolate while it is still hot and mix until smooth. Add the sugar, flour, egg yolk, vanilla, and nutmeg and mix until smooth.
4. Once the dough has risen, use a knife to divide the dough into three equal pieces. Roll the dough pieces with a rolling pin to rectangles 15 inches by 5 inches. Spread one-third of the filling down the center of each leaving a one-inch border with no filling. Roll the rectangle into fifteen-inch long ropes with the filling inside. Pinch any seams together and roll the ropes with your hands on the counter until smooth.
5. Braid the three ropes as if you were braiding pigtails and as shown in the picture to the right. (The dough shown is not chocolate.) Some people find it easier to create a symmetrical shape if they start braiding from the center. When you get to the ends, wet them, pinch them together, and tuck them under. You should have a neat, symmetrical loaf when you are through. You can shape the loaf somewhat with your hands. If you don't like how the loaf looks, simply pull the braids apart and start again.
6. Prepare a large baking sheet by greasing it and sprinkling it with cornmeal. Place the loaf on the pan, cover the loaf, and let it rise until doubled, about one hour.
7. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Bake the bread for 20 minutes then cover the bread with a large sheet of aluminum foil and bake for another ten to fifteen minutes to until done. The bread should “thump” when tapped on the bottom and the interior of the loaf should register 190 degrees with an insta-read thermometer. Let the bread cool on a wire rack.



8. While the bread is cooling, make the glaze. With a hand-held mixer, beat one ounce cream cheese with one teaspoon vanilla. Add 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar and 2 tablespoons cocoa with enough warm water to make a glaze of drizzling consistency. Drizzle the chocolate glaze generously over the bread.

Baker's notes: To quickly bring an egg to room temperature, place it in a cup of warm water.

Chocolate Peanut Butter Drops

This recipe makes a great kids' cookie.

It's packed with chocolate and almost confection-like but is so packed with energy and hearty oats that you won't mind giving your youngster a few. This cookie is best with a tall glass of milk.

This is an easy recipe and elicits emails from readers. One added nuts to the recipe with excellent results. Another added miniature marshmallows.



This is a range-top cookie. Because it is a no-baker and so full of energy, it makes a great camping cookie.

Ingredients

2 cups sugar
1/2 cup milk
1/4 cup butter
1/3 cocoa
2 1/2 cup quick oats
1/2 cup peanut butter
1/2 tablespoon vanilla extract

Directions

1. Combine sugar, milk, butter, and cocoa in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the mixture comes to a boil. Cook for two more minutes stirring constantly and then remove the pan from the heat.
2. Stir in the peanut butter and vanilla, then the oats.
3. Let cool for several minutes and then drop spoonfuls onto waxed paper. Let the cookies cool completely before removing them from the waxed paper.