

Chocolate Making

We know that chocolate comes from cacao beans, but how are those beans transformed into the luscious, smooth chocolate that melts in your mouth?

Chocolate in the Raw

Once the beans are harvested, they are fermented for a week, dried in the sun, and then sent off to the chocolate factory. There they are sorted according to quality and origin, then roasted to bring out their flavor.

After roasting, the beans are finely ground until they produce a syrupy liquid called liquor. The liquid comes from the oils that comprise half of the cocoa bean. Pure chocolate liquor sounds like something delicious to drink, but in fact it is very bitter.

To make baking chocolate, which is used in recipes, the liquor is simply poured into molds and allowed to solidify. Another product made from chocolate liquor is cocoa powder, which is made from pressing the oils from the liquid and grinding up the dry cake that is left. Cocoa powder is also used in recipes and to make hot chocolate (cocoa powder, hot milk, and sugar). The oils that are left over from squeezing form cocoa butter, which is used to make dry-skin lotion and sun tanning products.

Fine Chocolate

Many say fine chocolate making is an art form. Like any other, this art requires attention to detail. There are three steps an artisan chocolatier must take to make the perfect chocolate:

- I. According to his or her secret recipe, a chocolate maker adds ingredients to the chocolate product. Sugar, milk, and vanilla are the basic ones, but flavored chocolate can contain such diverse elements as Bulgarian rose water, Florida orange peel, and Chinese green tea extract.
- II. A special machine is used to blend the ingredients and make the chocolate smooth. This process is called conching, and it can last up to three days.
- III. The chocolate is tempered, or slowly heated and then cooled, to allow the cocoa butter to solidify properly. Without this step, the chocolate will not achieve the desired texture.

Chocolate making is, for some, a secret combination of selecting the right beans, roasting them properly, blending them with suitable ingredients, and lovingly smoothing and tempering the chocolate to perfection. Ask any artisan how he or she makes chocolate, and you are likely to hear, "It's a secret." But in the end, what matters for most of us is not the recipe but the delicious chocolate taste.