



# Mmmm... chocolate

**Know your products,  
use them wisely,  
and sweet goodness  
will be all yours**

The chocolate of my youth was sugar-loaded milk chocolate bordering on fudge. Dark chocolate was found in dedicated chocolate shops or arrived in ribbon-tied boxes on special occasions.

Today, top quality chocolate appears in supermarkets, health food stores and cookware shops. Artisanal labels boast “bean-to-bar,” “fair trade” or “single-origin.” Chocolate has never been better made, more popular – or more perplexing.

To ensure the chocolate you buy is quality and not a “chocolatey” knockoff, examine the label and watch for the following.

## The good

All true chocolate contains cocoa beans, often called cocoa mass. When you see a percentage on the label, this is what it is referring to. Quality dark chocolate will have cocoa beans, sugar, cocoa butter and maybe vanilla beans — in this order. Sugar should not be listed first. On the other hand, it’s fine for top-drawer milk chocolate to list sugar first. After this you should see, in any order, cocoa beans, cocoa butter, milk ingredients or milk powder, and/or soy lecithin. Vanilla is always the last ingredient.

## The bad

If the chocolate is made with modified oils, modified milk, artificial flavours or vanillin (and, no, that is not a typo!), put the bar back on the shelf and keep looking.

## The confusing

Chocolate works its way into baking in many forms — from dark cocoa-rich devil’s food cake to muffins studded with chocolate chips. While all-purpose flour is the workhorse of baking, there is no all-purpose chocolate.

*Here’s how to interpret what your recipe needs:*

**Cocoa powder** is basically dried, de-fatted cocoa beans. It delivers a lot of flavour and richness. Natural cocoa has a reddish tinge and is slightly acidic. Dutch-process cocoa, which has been alkalized, is darker and



Charmian  
Christie

less acidic. Don’t confuse these two baking cocoas with instant cocoa powder, which is sugar-loaded hot chocolate mix.

**Unsweetened or bitter chocolate** has no added sugar. It’s common in cakes and brownies where it delivers intense flavour and relies on the sugar in the batter to provide the sweetness.

**Bittersweet and semi-sweet chocolate** can be used in most recipes interchangeably. When buying, make sure sugar is not the first ingredient.

**Milk chocolate** is most common as a topping or glaze. With lots of cocoa butter and milk solids, it melts quickly but also burns easily.

**White chocolate** is technically not chocolate. While it contains cocoa butter, it lacks the required cocoa mass. Sweet, creamy and mild, it’s easily overpowered by strong flavours. However, it makes a striking visual contrast against dark chocolate.

**Chocolate chips** are designed to keep their shape when heated, not dissolve into the batter. They cannot be used in place of melted chocolate. However, if a recipe calls for chips, semi-sweet, milk or white chocolate chips are interchangeable.

## Storage wars

If your chocolate has a white film (bloom), don’t panic. Bloom is harmless, doesn’t affect taste and will disappear when the chocolate is melted. It is, however, evidence you need to reassess your chocolate storage.

• **Dark chocolate:** Keeps for up to a year if wrapped well and stored in a cool, dry place like a pantry cupboard.

• **Milk and white chocolate:** If you are not going to use it all within a few months, double wrap and freeze in a freezer bag with the air squeezed out. To prevent the chocolate from sweating when it defrosts, leave it wrapped until it has thawed.

• **Cocoa powder:** It won’t go rancid but it will lose intensity after a year. Store in an airtight container in a cool, dry place.

## Melting chocolate

Water and direct heat are the enemies of chocolate. Water will cause it to seize (turn lumpy and grainy), while intense heat will scorch it. To ensure your chocolate melts smoothly and doesn’t burn:

- Chop the chocolate into small pieces, about the size of chocolate chips.
- Heat in a bowl over hot (not boiling) water, or in the microwave in 30-second bursts.
- Stop heating when the chocolate is 80 per cent melted. Stir gently to dissolve the remaining bits.
- If the recipe allows, melt the chocolate along with cream, milk or butter.

## Chocolate Substitutions

**1 ounce unsweetened chocolate** = 3 tablespoons natural cocoa powder + 1 tablespoon butter, vegetable oil, *or* shortening

**1 ounce bittersweet or semisweet chocolate** = ½ ounce unsweetened chocolate + 1 tablespoon sugar *or* 3 tablespoons cocoa powder + 1 tablespoon sugar + 1 ½ teaspoons butter, vegetable oil *or* shortening

**3 tablespoons natural cocoa powder** = 3 tablespoons Dutch-processed cocoa powder

**3 tablespoons Dutch-processed cocoa powder** = 3 tablespoons natural cocoa powder plus a pinch of baking soda

**1 cup semisweet chocolate chips** = 1 cup milk or white chocolate chips *or* 1 cup chopped nuts (walnuts and pecans are the most common)





### DOUBLE-STUFF UBER-OREO COOKIES

This “Oreo” cookie is actually a classic pâte sablée pastry loaded with cocoa and acting as bookends for a decadent buttercream icing. I knew I nailed the recipe when a friend bit into one and giggled. She’s not a giggler.

Like the famous cookie that inspired it, this ultra-rich chocolate treat with its double-thick middle pulls apart easily. While these cookies aren’t a grab-a-handful after-school snack screaming for a glass of milk, they do gently request a second helping.

Makes 36 to 50

#### Cookies

**1½ cups** (375 ml) unsalted butter, at room temperature

**1½ cups** (375 ml) sifted confectioners’

sugar

**½ teaspoon** (2 ml) fine sea salt

**2 egg yolks**

**1 tablespoon** (15 ml) pure vanilla extract

**1½ cups** (375 ml) all-purpose flour

**1½ cups** (375 ml) Dutch-processed cocoa powder

#### Filling

**1 cup** (250 ml) unsalted butter, at room temperature

**3 cups** sifted confectioners’ sugar

**Generous pinch** of fine sea salt

**2 teaspoons** pure vanilla extract

**1.** Using an electric mixer or a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, beat the butter, confectioners’ sugar and salt together until light and fluffy. Add the yolks and vanilla

and beat until soft and light.

**2.** Into a medium bowl, sift the flour and cocoa together. Using a large wooden spoon or the stand mixer on its lowest setting, blend the flour mixture into the butter mixture. When all of the flour mixture is incorporated, increase the speed to medium and beat to ensure the dough is well blended.

**3.** Divide the dough in half and spoon onto plastic wrap. Form each half into a roll 25 cm (10 inches) long and approximately 5 cm (2 inches) wide. Make the rolls as round as you can. If you can’t make them uniformly round, make the rolls square. The aim is to be uniform, so pick the shape you can make best. Refrigerate for at least two hours or overnight. Alternatively, the raw dough can be frozen for a couple of months.

**4.** When you’re ready to bake, preheat the oven to 325° F and line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

**5.** Using a sharp, thin-bladed knife, slice the dough into very thin rounds and place on the baking sheets a couple of centimetres apart. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, or until the cookies are firm when touched in the middle. Cool on racks.

**6.** While the cookies are baking, prepare the filling. Using an electric mixer or a stand mixer fitted with a whisk, beat the butter until smooth. Add the confectioners’ sugar, salt and vanilla and beat on low speed to incorporate the sugar. When the sugar is fully absorbed, increase the speed and beat until the filling is very light and almost white, at least five minutes.

**7.** To assemble, flip a cooled cookie upside down and top with one tablespoon of filling; place a second cookie on top (bottom against the filling), and gently press. Repeat with the remaining cookies and filling.

**TIP:** If you don’t have Dutch-processed cocoa powder, use regular and add 1/2 teaspoon baking soda.

*This recipe is excerpted with permission from The Messy Baker: More than 75 Delicious Recipes from a Real Kitchen by Charmian Christie.*

### GINGERBREAD SPICE HOT CHOCOLATE

This is like a chocolate-dipped ginger cookie in liquid form. It’s rich, so a small cup will leave you warm and satisfied. It’s also very easy to customize. If you like Dutch-style gingerbread, swap in honey for sugar, then add a couple cardamom pods, a few grindings of black pepper, and a star anise to the spices listed below. Prefer a more classic hot chocolate? Skip the spices altogether.

#### Hot Chocolate

**4 cups** (1 litre) homogenized milk

**¼ cup** (60 ml) sugar

**2-inch piece** fresh ginger root, grated

**2 three-inch** cinnamon sticks

**3 whole** cloves

**6 strips** orange zest, removed with a vegetable peeler

**8 ounces** (226 g) dark semi-sweet chocolate (70%), broken into small pieces

**2 tablespoons** (30 ml) orange or ginger liqueur (optional)

#### Optional Topping

**1 cup** (250 ml) cream, optional

**2 tablespoons** (30 ml) sugar

**Cocoa powder** or ground cinnamon for dusting

**1.** Place the milk, sugar, ginger, cinnamon, cloves and orange zest in a medium saucepan over medium heat. As soon as the milk reaches the boil, remove the pan from the heat, cover, and let the flavours infuse for at least 20 minutes. (If you are in a hurry, pour the milk into a regular blender and pulse a few times to release flavours more quickly. Then return the milk to the pan.)

**2.** Gently rewarm the spiced milk. While the milk reheats, whip the cream with sugar in a small bowl until stiff peaks form.

**3.** Place the chocolate pieces in a medium bowl with the liqueur, if using. Pour the warm milk over the chocolate through a fine mesh sieve. Discard the captured spices. Whisk the warm milk into the chocolate, blending until smooth. Ladle the



hot chocolate into mugs, top with a dollop of whipped cream and a dusting of cocoa powder or cinnamon. Serve immediately.

**4.** Any leftover hot chocolate can be

refrigerated in a covered container for up to three days and rewarmed gently on the stove or in a microwave at half power. **5**

Serves 6 to 8.