

Expand Your "Chocabulary"

How much do you know about chocolate?
This handy primer will turn you into a chocolate impressario in no time!

The Primary Types of Chocolate

Bittersweet or Semi Sweet (Dark) Chocolate: Sweetened chocolate with a minimum cocoa bean or chocolate liquor content of 35% by weight, and which may contain up to 12% milk solids. Dark chocolate is the latest rage, often preferred by adults with equally sophisticated food palates. The current trend favors bittersweet and semi sweet chocolates with far more than the minimum required chocolate liquor content, and with little or no milk content, resulting in more intense chocolate flavor and complexity, and less sweetness.

Milk Chocolate: Sweet chocolate that contains a minimum of 10% by weight of chocolate liquor, at least 3.39% milk fat, and a minimum of 12% milk solids (inclusive of milk fat). The current trend favors milk chocolates with more than the minimum of chocolate liquor, producing more chocolate flavor and less sweetness.

White Chocolate: A sweet ivory-colored confection that contains by weight at least 20% cocoa butter, at least 14% milk solids, and at least 3.5% milk fat, and no more than 55% sweeteners.

Chocabulary from A to Z

Alkalized or Dutch Processed Cocoa Powder: Cocoa powder that has been chemically treated (usually with potassium carbonate) to reduce acidity. See Cocoa Powder.

Aroma: The variety of scents given off by individual chocolate. Hold different kinds of chocolates to the nose and you'll quickly see that each has an individual and distinctive aroma.

Bloom: Dullness, streaks, graying, or whitish discoloration on the surface of chocolate caused by poor tempering, temperature fluctuations and/or moisture in storage. Bloom is unattractive but not harmful.

Cacao: The defining ingredient in all chocolate and chocolate products. The term "cacao" refers to the tree and its fruit and the seeds (otherwise known as cocoa beans) inside the fruit, which are processed to make chocolate.

Varieties of Cacao:

Theobroma Cacao: The botanical name for the tree, fruit, and seeds from which chocolate is made.

Criollo: Considered the rarest and most prized of the three or four recognized varieties of cacao, Criollo is native to either northern South America and or Mesoamerica. Prized for their fragrance and delicate and complex flavor, criollos are "flavor beans" which account for less than 1% of the world's cacao.

Forastero: The hardiest and most productive of the three or four cacao varieties, Forastero is believed to have originated

in the Amazon basin. Today it is grown around the globe and accounts for over 90% percent of the world's cacao. Chocolate manufacturers value Forasteros for basic robust chocolate flavor.

Nacional or Arriba: The proposed fourth variety of cacao from Ecuador, otherwise considered a finer strain of Forastero.

Trinitario: One of three or four recognized varieties of cacao, Trinitario is a hybrid of the flavorful Criollo and hardy Forastero. Along with Criollos, Trinitarios are considered "flavor beans" and they account for less than 5% of the world cacao crop.

Cacao Beans/Cocoa Beans: Chocolate is made from cocoa beans, which are the seeds of the fruit of the cacao tree.

Chocolate Liquor: Also known as unsweetened chocolate which is often used in baking, chocolate liquor is pure ground-up cacao nibs (see cocoa nibs). There is no alcohol in chocolate liquor however!

Chocolate Truffle: A rich confection made from chocolate and cream (ganache), although it may contain butter, eggs, and other flavorings. Truffles may be dipped in chocolate and or rolled in cocoa powder. Although American-style chocolate truffles are larger and may be decorated, the original European chocolate truffle is bite-sized with a rough cocoa-y exterior.

Cocoa: The term cocoa is used in different ways. When it appears on a chocolate label with a percentage, it denotes the total cocoa bean (cacao) content of the chocolate and the term is sometimes used interchangeably with chocolate liquor, cacao, cocoa beans or cocoa solids. Not to be confused with Cocoa Powder.

Cocoa Powder: Used as an ingredient in baking, or the base for a hot beverage. Cocoa powder is chocolate liquor, which has been pressed to remove most of its fat, and then pulverized to a powder. High fat cocoa powders typically contain 22%-24% cocoa; low-fat cocoa powders typically contain 10%-12% cocoa butter. Natural Cocoa Powder: Cocoa powder that has not been "Dutch" processed or treated with chemical alkalis.

Cocoa Butter: The unique ivory colored fat that constitutes 50 to 54% of roasted cocoa beans. Cocoa butter has little flavor of its own, but it adds considerable richness and depth to the flavor of chocolate. Cocoa butter makes chocolate fluid when melted and crisp when hardened. Chocolate melts readily and luxuriously on the tongue because cocoa butter melts at body temperature. Cocoa butter contributes to the creamy smooth texture and the long finish that characterizes fine chocolate.

Cocoa Nibs: Pieces of hulled, roasted cocoa beans. Nibs are composed of fat called cocoa butter (50%-54%) and non-fat dry solids fat (46%-50%).

Cocoa Solid: An alternate term referring to the total cocoa bean or cacao content of chocolate.

Cocoa Mass or Cocoa Masse: An alternate term for the total cocoa bean, cacao, chocolate liquor, or cocoa content of chocolate.

Dry or Non-Fat Cocoa Solids: The non-fat portion of the cocoa bean.

Conching: The proprietary conching process used by Ghirardelli is one of the reasons

Ghirardelli chocolate is so creamy and delicious. Conching is the prolonged heating, mixing and scraping or grinding process done during the last stages of chocolate manufacture. Conching produces both a smooth texture by reducing the size of the particles and mixing them, and a smooth flavor by driving off unwanted harsh flavors and aromas.

Couverture: Chocolate with a minimum of 32% cocoa butter. Most couverture these days contains even more than 32% cocoa butter!

Dutch Process Cocoa: cocoa that has been processed with Potassium Carbonate to reduce acidity (and darken color).

Ganache: A mixture of chocolate and cream used as the filling for chocolate truffles, but also for sauces, glazes and cake fillings.

Gloss: The satiny sheen or mirror-like shine on the surface of a perfectly tempered piece of chocolate.

Lecithin: A natural emulsifier added to chocolate to promote fluidity when the chocolate is melted. The lecithin used in chocolate manufacture is derived from soy.

Mouthfeel: The texture of a substance in your mouth; how the chocolate feels as it melts on your palate.

Notes: The variety of distinctive flavors or hints of flavor that one can pick up when tasting and appreciating an individual piece of chocolate. Chocolate, like fine wine, has a flavor profile that's very individual. It's common to pick up hints of smoke, coffee, cherry, vanilla, nuts or citrus in chocolate. Further, no two people will necessarily pick up the exact same notes in chocolate, depending on their experience savoring chocolate.

Percentage: The percentage label on chocolate bars indicates the total amount of the bar, by weight, comprised of cocoa beans (including added cocoa butter or dry cocoa solids). Dark chocolate generally features a higher percentage of cocoa than milk chocolate. While a high cocoa percentage (60% or more) is a sign of quality in dark chocolate, 90% cocoa content in a bar is not necessarily "better." This is because as the cocoa percentage is increased, chocolate becomes more and more bitter in flavor to the point that it becomes unpalatable.

Snap: The sound and the feel of chocolate as it breaks or is bitten. A sharp, crisp snap indicates fine particle size, high quality cocoa butter, and good tempering. Dark chocolate generally has more "snap" than softer milk chocolate.

Tempering: The process of controlled heating, cooling and stirring that creates a stable structure of the cocoa butter (fat) crystals in chocolate. Tempering causes chocolate to harden uniformly with an even color, brittle texture (snap) and glossy surface.

Vanillin: A synthetic substitute for vanilla.

White Confectionery Coating: Although apparently similar to white chocolate, white confectionery coating contains no part of the cocoa bean. It is made with sugar, milk and milk fat, vanilla, lecithin, and vegetable fats.