

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1

Melting, ganache, truffles, brownies, cakes, cookies, warm puddings and a chocolate gift box.

7 Chapters | Philip Osztromok | Generated with Claude

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Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1

Chapter 1 · How Chocolate Works

SKILL GOAL

Choose chocolate by cocoa percentage, melt it gently without seizing, and make four easy chocolate treats.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Chocolate is **cocoa solids, cocoa butter and (usually) sugar and milk**. The cocoa percentage on the label is how much of the bar comes from the cocoa bean (solids and butter together); the rest is sugar, milk and other ingredients. This course uses ordinary supermarket chocolate: no tempering is needed, and Chocolate 2 will take you further.



Figure 1. The higher the cocoa percentage, the less sugar and milk and the more bitter and intense the chocolate.

What to know

- **Cocoa percentage:** higher means more bitter and less sweet. Seventy per cent is a good all-rounder for baking, and about 50 to 60% is gentler.
- **Baking chocolate vs eating chocolate:** both work; use a bar you would happily eat, as the flavour shows.
- **Chocolate and water don't mix.** A drop of water makes melted chocolate seize into a grainy lump.

- **Chocolate scorches.** Always melt it gently, and take it off the heat before it has completely melted.
- **Bloom:** a pale, dusty or streaky film on old chocolate is bloom, from cocoa butter or sugar rising to the surface after a warm spell or the fridge. It is harmless, and fine for melting and baking.

TYPE	ROUGH COCOA	TASTE	BEST FOR
Milk	30 to 40%	Sweet, creamy	Eating, children's treats, softer ganache
Plain	50 to 60%	Balanced	Everyday baking and dipping
Dark	About 70%	Bittersweet, intense	Ganache, brownies, cakes
Extra dark	85% and over	Bitter	A little, to deepen flavour
Cocoa powder	Pure cocoa, no sugar	Strong, bitter	Drinks, cakes, dusting

These ranges are general: brands vary, so check the label.

MELTING, SEIZING AND STORING

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Seizing: even a drop of water or steam turns melted chocolate into a thick, grainy lump. Keep bowls, spoons and fruit completely dry, and don't let the bowl touch the water or let steam escape into it. If it does seize, stir in a teaspoon of warm cream, milk or flavourless oil and it may smooth out again (it won't be tempered, but it is still good for baking and sauces).

Storing chocolate: keep chocolate wrapped in a cool, dry cupboard (about 15 to 18°C), away from strong smells and sunlight. Chocolate treats made with cream (ganache, truffles) belong in the fridge.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

A chocolate tasting

10 minutes | 2 to 4 tasters | noticing how cocoa percentage changes the taste

Before cooking with chocolate, taste it. Compare three bars side by side and write down what you notice: how sweet, how bitter, how it melts in the mouth.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1 bar	bar of milk chocolate
1 bar	bar of plain chocolate (about 50 to 60%)
1 bar	bar of dark chocolate (about 70%)
1	glass of water, to cleanse your palate

1. Break a small square from each bar and put them in a row, milk to dark. Look at the colour and listen to the snap.
2. Taste one square at a time, letting it melt on your tongue for a moment before chewing. Sip water between squares.
3. Fill in the tasting notes: sweetness, bitterness, creaminess, and which you would pick for baking and which for eating.

ALLERGENS, CAFFEINE AND STORING

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

Caffeine: dark chocolate and cocoa contain some caffeine, more in higher-cocoa chocolate. Offer smaller portions to children and avoid dark chocolate drinks late in the evening if you are sensitive.

Storing chocolate: keep chocolate wrapped in a cool, dry cupboard (about 15 to 18°C), away from strong smells and sunlight. Chocolate treats made with cream (ganache, truffles) belong in the fridge.

LEVEL 1 · DIP

Chocolate-dipped frozen banana

20 minutes plus 1 hour freezing | 4 portions | melting chocolate and coating a cold, dry food

Sliced banana dipped in melted chocolate and frozen: a lighter treat that teaches the basic skill of melting and dipping. The banana must be dry, and a teaspoon of oil keeps the coating from cracking when it is frozen.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2	ripe bananas, firm rather than very soft
100 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), chopped
1 tsp	flavourless oil
1	tray lined with baking parchment

1. Peel the bananas and cut into thick slices (about 2 cm). Pat dry with kitchen paper.
2. Melt the chocolate with the oil, stirring (see the box), until smooth.
3. Dip each slice halfway, or fully, using a fork, tapping off the extra. Put on the tray and freeze for **at least 1 hour**.

MELTING, FROZEN PIECES AND KNIVES

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Frozen pieces: frozen banana and chocolate are very cold and hard, so give small children small pieces and let them soften for a minute or two before eating.

Knife safety: chop chocolate on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath) with a large knife held firmly, and keep your guiding fingertips tucked back. A serrated knife grips a hard bar better than a smooth blade.

Steam and hot bowls: a bowl over a pan of simmering water gets hot and steam burns. Use

> oven gloves or a cloth to lift it, keep your face back when you lift it off, and keep children away from the hob.

LEVEL 2 · MIX-IN

Chocolate crackles

20 minutes plus 30 minutes chilling | 12 crackles | folding a dry ingredient into melted chocolate

A classic children's party treat: puffed rice stirred through melted chocolate, syrup and butter and set in paper cases. Work gently, because the rice crushes easily.

INGREDIENTS (12 PORTIONS)

100 g	milk or plain chocolate, chopped
2 tbsp	golden syrup
30 g	butter
60 g	puffed rice cereal
12	paper cake cases

1. Melt the chocolate, syrup and butter together in a bowl over barely simmering water, stirring until smooth. Take off the heat and let it cool for 2 minutes.
2. Fold in the puffed rice with a spatula until every piece is coated.
3. Spoon into the paper cases and chill for **30 minutes** until set.

MELTING, STEAM AND KEEPING

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Steam and hot bowls: a bowl over a pan of simmering water gets hot and steam burns. Use oven gloves or a cloth to lift it, keep your face back when you lift it off, and keep children away from the hob.

Keeping: chocolate crackles keep in an airtight tin for about 5 days (general guidance). In warm weather keep them in the fridge, or they go soft and sticky.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many

> coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 2 · COCOA

A cocoa-powder hot chocolate

10 minutes | 1 mug | mixing cocoa powder smoothly into a hot drink

Cocoa powder is chocolate with most of the fat taken out, so it needs a little sugar and care to mix. Make a paste with a splash of cold milk first and no lumps will be left.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

2 tsp	cocoa powder
2 tsp	caster sugar, or to taste
250 ml	whole milk
1 pinch	salt
1	mug

1. Put the cocoa, sugar and salt in the mug or a small pan. Stir in 2 tablespoons of the milk to make a smooth paste.
2. Heat the rest of the milk until it is steaming and stir it in, a little at a time, whisking until smooth.
3. Let it cool for a minute and taste. Add a little more sugar if you like.

HOT MILK, CAFFEINE AND ALLERGENS

Hot milk: heat milk gently and stir, watching so it doesn't boil over. Hot milk and hot chocolate burn skin: let the drink cool for a minute before giving it to a child.

Caffeine: dark chocolate and cocoa contain some caffeine, more in higher-cocoa chocolate. Offer smaller portions to children and avoid dark chocolate drinks late in the evening if you are sensitive.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Cocoa percentage

Milk, plain and dark.

1. Melt a small amount of each of the three chocolates separately and taste each warm and set. Then make the hot chocolate with the same amount of each.

Look for: The milk chocolate is sweet and mild; the dark is bitter and strong, and needs more sugar in a drink. Choose the percentage you like best.

EXPERIMENT

Fridge or cupboard

Where to store it.

1. Keep a square of the same chocolate in the fridge for a day and another in a cool cupboard, and taste them.

Look for: The fridge chocolate is harder, may look dull and tastes less. The cupboard one is smooth and fragrant. Store chocolate cool and dry, not in the fridge.

EXPERIMENT

Chopped or whole

How fast it melts.

1. Melt 50 g of chopped chocolate and 50 g of whole squares, over the same gentle heat, and time them.

Look for: The chopped chocolate melts evenly and fast; the whole squares melt slowly and unevenly. Chop it first.

EXPERIMENT

Water in chocolate

A deliberate seize.

1. Melt a small piece of chocolate, then stir in half a teaspoon of water. Then stir in a teaspoon of warm milk to another seized piece to try to rescue it.

Look for: A tiny drop of water makes the chocolate stiff and grainy. The warm milk may bring it back, but it is thicker and no longer shiny. Keep water away!

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Chocolate tasting				
Frozen banana				
Chocolate crackles				
Cocoa hot chocolate				
Cocoa percentage				
Fridge or cupboard				
Chopped or whole				
Water in chocolate				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Thick, grainy lump	Water or steam got in	Stir in a spoon of warm cream or milk, or use for baking
Dull, bitter chocolate	Overheated	Start again with fresh chocolate; use gentle heat
White film on the bar	Bloom	Harmless: melt and use it in baking

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Lumps in hot chocolate	Cocoa not mixed to a paste	Make a paste with a little cold milk first
Banana coating cracks	Banana wet, or no oil in the chocolate	Pat dry; add a teaspoon of oil
Crackles sticky	Warm room or stored warm	Chill them, and keep them in an airtight tin

MELTING, HOT MILK AND ALLERGENS

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Hot milk: heat milk gently and stir, watching so it doesn't boil over. Hot milk and hot chocolate burn skin: let the drink cool for a minute before giving it to a child.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can say what a cocoa percentage means.
- ☐ I know why water makes chocolate seize.
- ☐ I can melt chocolate gently and dip a dry food.
- ☐ I mix cocoa powder to a paste before heating.
- ☐ I store chocolate cool and dry.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 2 is Melting and Dipping: coating fruit, biscuits and pretzels, and making bark.

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1

Chapter 2 · Melting and Dipping

SKILL GOAL

Melt chocolate gently and use it to coat fruit, biscuits and ice cream.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Melting and dipping is the first real chocolate skill. You need only **gentle heat, dry food and a little patience**. Chocolate melts at about body temperature, so it does not need to get hot: the gentler the heat, the smoother and glossier the result.

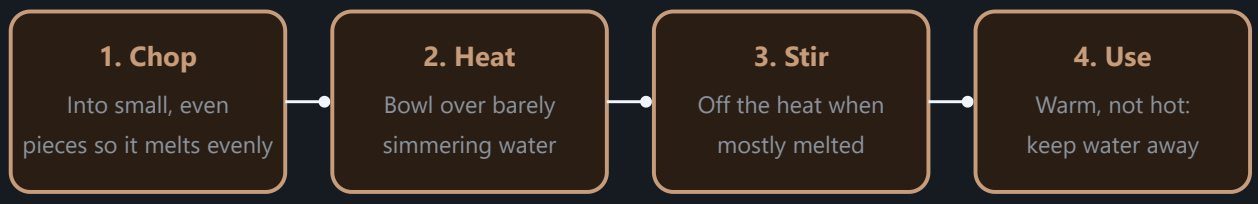


Figure 2. Chocolate wants gentle heat. Take it off before it has fully melted and stir.

The method

- **Chop it small** and evenly, so it melts at the same rate.
- **Use a bowl over simmering water** (not touching), or the microwave in short bursts with stirring.
- **Stop before it has fully melted** and stir: the heat left in the bowl melts the rest without scorching it.
- **Keep everything dry:** bowls, spoons and food.
- **Use it warm,** not hot, so it coats rather than runs off.

METHOD	GOOD FOR	WATCH OUT FOR
Bowl over simmering water	Most melting; gentle and forgiving	Steam, and the bowl touching the water
Microwave in 20-second bursts	Small amounts, in a hurry	Hot spots: stir every time
Melting into hot cream or butter	Ganache and sauces (Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 3)	Cream that is too hot
Coconut oil added	Shell topping and thin coatings	Too much oil: it won't set firm

MELTING, STEAM AND SEIZING

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Steam and hot bowls: a bowl over a pan of simmering water gets hot and steam burns. Use oven gloves or a cloth to lift it, keep your face back when you lift it off, and keep children away from the hob.

Seizing: even a drop of water or steam turns melted chocolate into a thick, grainy lump. Keep bowls, spoons and fruit completely dry, and don't let the bowl touch the water or let steam escape into it. If it does seize, stir in a teaspoon of warm cream, milk or flavourless oil and it may smooth out again (it won't be tempered, but it is still good for baking and sauces).

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Dipped strawberries

20 minutes plus 20 minutes setting | 4 portions | melting chocolate and dipping dry fruit

The easiest elegant treat: strawberries dipped three-quarters in glossy chocolate, with an optional white drizzle. The skill is dry fruit and warm, not hot, chocolate.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

250 g	strawberries, washed and thoroughly dried (stalks on)
100 g	dark or milk chocolate, chopped
30 g	white chocolate, chopped, to drizzle (optional)
1	tray lined with baking parchment

1. Melt the chocolate in a heatproof bowl over barely simmering water (see the box), stirring until smooth. Take off the heat and let it cool for 2 minutes.
2. Hold each strawberry by the stalk, dip three-quarters of the way in, lift, and let the extra drip off. Place on the tray.
3. Melt the white chocolate separately, and drizzle it over the set or half-set strawberries with a spoon. Chill for **20 minutes** until firm.

MELTING, STEAM, FRUIT AND ALLERGENS

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Steam and hot bowls: a bowl over a pan of simmering water gets hot and steam burns. Use oven gloves or a cloth to lift it, keep your face back when you lift it off, and keep children away from the hob.

Fruit: wash strawberries and other fruit and dry them completely with kitchen paper before dipping: any water on the surface makes the chocolate seize or slide off. Dipped fruit is at its best the day it is made and should be eaten within about 24 hours, kept in the fridge (general guidance).

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes

> nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 1 · SPREAD

Chocolate bark

20 minutes plus 1 hour setting | 10 pieces | spreading melted chocolate and topping it

Bark is melted chocolate spread thin on paper, scattered with toppings and broken into pieces. There is nothing to get wrong, and it shows how flexible chocolate is.

INGREDIENTS (10 PORTIONS)

200 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), chopped
50 g	mixed toppings (dried fruit, seeds, chopped nuts, sprinkles)
1 pinch	sea salt flakes (optional)
1	tray lined with baking parchment

1. Melt the chocolate gently, stirring until smooth. Take it off the heat when it is almost melted and stir the last lumps in.
2. Pour it onto the lined tray and spread with a spatula to about 5 mm thick. Scatter the toppings and a pinch of salt while it is still wet.
3. Chill for **1 hour** until firm, then break into rough pieces.

MELTING, TOPPINGS AND KEEPING

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Toppings: sprinkles, nuts, dried fruit and seeds should be dry and small. Whole nuts and hard sweets are a choking risk for very young children, and nuts are a serious allergen: keep a nut-free tray if anyone has an allergy.

Keeping: bark, dipped biscuits and pretzels keep in an airtight tin in a cool place for about 1 to 2 weeks (general guidance). If the room is warm, keep them in the fridge and let them come to room temperature before serving.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many

> coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 2 · DIP

Dipped biscuits and pretzels

20 minutes plus 30 minutes setting | 10 pieces | coating dry foods evenly and tapping off the extra

Biscuits and pretzels are sweet, salty and crunchy under chocolate. Use a fork to lift them out, and tap the fork on the edge of the bowl to take off the extra so the coating stays thin.

INGREDIENTS (10 PORTIONS)

100 g	milk or dark chocolate, chopped
10	plain biscuits or pretzels
2 tbsp	sprinkles or crushed nuts
1	tray lined with baking parchment

1. Melt the chocolate gently in a small, deep bowl so there is depth to dip into.
2. Dip each biscuit or pretzel, turn to coat, lift with a fork and tap off the extra. Slide onto the tray and add sprinkles at once.
3. Chill for **30 minutes** until set.

MELTING, WHEAT AND TOPPINGS

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Pretzels and biscuits: they contain wheat and often milk, egg and soy, so check the labels. Gluten-free pretzels or biscuits work equally well.

Toppings: sprinkles, nuts, dried fruit and seeds should be dry and small. Whole nuts and hard sweets are a choking risk for very young children, and nuts are a serious allergen: keep a nut-free tray if anyone has an allergy.

Keeping: bark, dipped biscuits and pretzels keep in an airtight tin in a cool place for about 1 to

> 2 weeks (general guidance). If the room is warm, keep them in the fridge and let them come to room temperature before serving.

LEVEL 3 · SHELL

Chocolate shell topping

15 minutes | 6 portions | making a chocolate that sets on cold ice cream

The topping that sets hard on ice cream with a crack. Coconut oil is solid when cold, so the chocolate turns into a thin shell the moment it touches the ice cream. Pour it warm, not hot. (See Cooking Skills: Ice Cream 1, chapter 6, for mix-ins and swirls.)

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

150 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), chopped
3 tbsp	coconut oil
1 pinch	salt
4	scoops of ice cream or frozen yogurt, to serve

1. Melt the chocolate and coconut oil together gently, stirring until smooth. Add the salt and cool for 5 minutes, until just warm.
2. Put the scoops in cold bowls. Pour the topping slowly over each scoop in a thin stream.
3. Wait **30 seconds** for the shell to set, then crack with a spoon.

MELTING, FAT, ALLERGENS AND KEEPING

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Shell topping: coconut oil makes the chocolate set to a hard, thin shell as soon as it meets cold ice cream. Make it just before you need it, let it cool until just warm, and pour it in a thin stream: hot topping melts the ice cream. It is high in saturated fat, so a spoonful is enough.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Microwave or bowl over water

Two ways to melt.

1. Melt 50 g of chocolate in the microwave in 20-second bursts and another 50 g over simmering water. Compare the time and the finish.

Look for: Both work: the water method is slower but gentler, and the microwave is quick but more likely to overheat. Stir the microwave batch every burst.

EXPERIMENT

Temperature of dipped items

Cold or room temperature.

1. Dip one strawberry straight from the fridge and another at room temperature. Compare the coatings.

Look for: The cold fruit sets the chocolate quickly in a thicker, sometimes dull coating; the room-temperature fruit gives a smoother, thinner one. Take fruit out for 20 minutes first.

EXPERIMENT

Thick or thin coating

Dip once, or twice.

1. Dip one biscuit once and another twice, letting the first coat set between dips.

Look for: One coat is crisp and delicate; two coats are sturdier but richer. Use more coats for items that will be handled.

EXPERIMENT

Adding oil

With and without.

1. Melt 50 g of chocolate on its own and 50 g with a teaspoon of oil. Dip a spoon in each and let it set.

Look for: The oiled chocolate is thinner and softer when set; the plain is thicker and snappier. A little oil helps with frozen items.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Dipped strawberries				
Chocolate bark				
Dipped biscuits and pretzels				
Shell topping				
Microwave or bowl				
Temperature of dipped items				
Thick or thin coating				
Adding oil				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Chocolate is thick and grainy	Water got in, or it overheated	Stir in a spoon of warm oil or cream; keep things dry

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Coating slides off	Fruit was wet	Dry it completely with kitchen paper
Coating is dull or streaky	Chocolate got too warm or cooled slowly	Use gentle heat; chill briefly to set
Shell topping doesn't set	Not enough oil, or the ice cream is soft	Add a little more coconut oil; use firm ice cream
Bark is soft	Too thick, or warm room	Spread thinner and chill
Sprinkles bleed colour	Dampness	Add sprinkles as it sets and keep it dry

MELTING, ALLERGENS AND STORING

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

Keeping: bark, dipped biscuits and pretzels keep in an airtight tin in a cool place for about 1 to 2 weeks (general guidance). If the room is warm, keep them in the fridge and let them come to room temperature before serving.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can melt chocolate gently in a bowl over water.
- ☐ I keep fruit and food completely dry.
- ☐ I can dip, tap off the extra and set a coating.
- ☐ I can spread bark and add toppings.
- ☐ I can make a shell topping for ice cream.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 3 is Ganache: chocolate and cream melted together into hot chocolate, sauces and glazes.

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1

Chapter 3 · Ganache

SKILL GOAL

Make ganache at different ratios and use it as a drink, a sauce, a filling and a glaze.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Ganache is **chocolate and hot cream stirred together into a smooth emulsion**. It is one of the most useful things in chocolate cooking: the same mixture is a hot chocolate, a sauce, a glaze, a filling or a truffle centre, and the only thing that changes is the ratio of chocolate to cream.

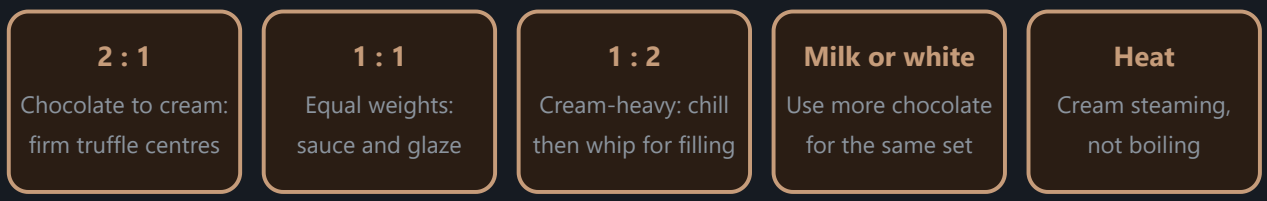


Figure 3. One mixture, three results: change only the ratio of chocolate to cream.

The method

- **Chop the chocolate finely,** so the cream melts it all without extra heat.
- **Heat the cream until it steams,** not until it boils.
- **Pour, wait, then stir:** leave the hot cream on the chocolate for a minute or two, then stir slowly from the middle.
- **Stir slowly,** to avoid air bubbles, and stop when smooth and glossy.
- **Choose the ratio** for the job (see the table), and use more chocolate for milk or white.

USE	DARK CHOCOLATE : CREAM (BY WEIGHT)	RESULT
Hot chocolate	About 1 : 4 with milk	Rich, drinkable
Sauce and glaze	1 : 1	Pourable, glossy, thickens as it cools
Whipped filling	1 : 2 (chill and whip)	Light, soft, mousse-like
Truffles	2 : 1	Firm, rollable (Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 4)

These ratios are for dark chocolate (about 70%). Milk and white chocolate contain more sugar and milk and set more softly, so use about a third more chocolate for the same set.

HOT CREAM, SPLITTING AND KEEPING

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Splitting: if a ganache looks oily or grainy, the cream was too hot or it was stirred too hard. Whisk in a tablespoon of warm milk or cream, a spoonful at a time, until it is smooth and glossy again.

Keeping: ganache is made with cream, so keep it covered in the fridge and use it within about 5 days (general guidance). Bring it back to a spreadable or pourable state gently: warm in short microwave bursts, stirring, or stand at room temperature. Don't leave cream-based sweets out for more than a couple of hours.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Rich hot chocolate

10 minutes | 1 large mug | melting chocolate into hot liquid

The simplest ganache is a hot chocolate: real chocolate melted into hot milk. Pour the hot milk over finely chopped chocolate, wait a moment, then whisk smooth. It is far richer than a cocoa drink.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

60 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), finely chopped
250 ml	whole milk
1 tsp	caster sugar, or to taste
1 pinch	salt

1. Put the chopped chocolate, sugar and salt in a mug or heatproof jug.
2. Heat the milk in a small pan until it is steaming and just starts to bubble at the edges. Pour about a third over the chocolate and leave for **1 minute**.
3. Whisk until smooth, then stir in the rest of the milk. Taste and add sugar if you like.

HOT MILK, CAFFEINE AND ALLERGENS

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Caffeine: dark chocolate and cocoa contain some caffeine, more in higher-cocoa chocolate. Offer smaller portions to children and avoid dark chocolate drinks late in the evening if you are sensitive.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 1 · SAUCE

Pourable chocolate ganache (sauce)

15 minutes | 6 portions | making a ganache at a one-to-one ratio

Equal weights of chocolate and cream make a smooth, glossy sauce that thickens as it cools. Pour it over ice cream, cake or fruit.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

150 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), finely chopped
150 ml	double cream
1 tsp	vanilla extract

1. Put the chocolate in a heatproof bowl. Heat the cream until it just starts to steam at the edges (don't let it boil).
2. Pour the hot cream over the chocolate, covering it all, and leave for **2 minutes** without stirring.
3. Stir slowly from the centre outwards until completely smooth and glossy. Stir in the vanilla. Serve warm, or cool for a thicker sauce.

HOT CREAM, SPLITTING AND KEEPING

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Splitting: if a ganache looks oily or grainy, the cream was too hot or it was stirred too hard. Whisk in a tablespoon of warm milk or cream, a spoonful at a time, until it is smooth and glossy again.

Keeping: ganache is made with cream, so keep it covered in the fridge and use it within about 5 days (general guidance). Bring it back to a spreadable or pourable state gently: warm in short microwave bursts, stirring, or stand at room temperature. Don't leave cream-based sweets out for more than a couple of hours.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many

> coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 2 · WHIPPED

Whipped ganache (filling)

15 minutes plus 4 hours chilling | 8 portions | chilling and whipping a cream-heavy ganache

Twice as much cream as chocolate gives a ganache that sets softly when chilled and whips up light, like a chocolate mousse. Use it to fill and top cakes, cupcakes and tarts.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

150 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), finely chopped
300 ml	double cream
1 tsp	vanilla extract

1. Make the ganache with the chocolate and half of the cream (heated), as for the sauce, and stir until smooth. Stir in the rest of the **cold** cream and the vanilla.
2. Cool, cover and chill for **at least 4 hours** until very cold and thick.
3. Whisk with an electric whisk for 1 to 2 minutes, only until it holds soft peaks. Use at once.

HOT CREAM, WHIPPING AND KEEPING

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Whipping ganache: chill it completely first (at least 4 hours) and whisk only until it holds soft peaks. Whisked too long, it turns grainy and stiff, like butter.

Keeping: ganache is made with cream, so keep it covered in the fridge and use it within about 5 days (general guidance). Bring it back to a spreadable or pourable state gently: warm in short microwave bursts, stirring, or stand at room temperature. Don't leave cream-based sweets out for more than a couple of hours.

LEVEL 3 · GLAZE

Glossy ganache glaze

20 minutes plus cooling | enough for a 20 cm cake | pouring a warm glaze over a cooled cake

A mirror-shiny glaze for cakes and brownies. Golden syrup keeps it glossy and butter makes it soft to cut. The trick is to pour it at the right temperature: too hot and it runs, too cold and it sets in lumps.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

150 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), finely chopped
150 ml	double cream
1 tbsp	golden syrup (for shine)
15 g	butter, at room temperature

1. Make the ganache with the chocolate, cream and golden syrup, stirring until smooth. Stir in the butter until melted.
2. Let it cool for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until it is thick but still pourable.
3. Pour onto the centre of a completely cooled cake, tilt gently to cover the top, and leave to set for at least 30 minutes. Don't touch it.

HOT CREAM, GLAZE TEMPERATURE AND DAIRY-FREE

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Glaze temperature: use the glaze when it is just warm and thickly pourable (about 35°C). Hot glaze runs off and melts the cake. A cooled cake gives a clean finish.

Dairy-free swap: full-fat coconut cream (the thick part from a chilled tin) and dairy-free dark chocolate make a good ganache, with a coconut flavour. The set is a little softer.

Keeping: ganache is made with cream, so keep it covered in the fridge and use it within about 5 days (general guidance). Bring it back to a spreadable or pourable state gently: warm in short

> microwave bursts, stirring, or stand at room temperature. Don't leave cream-based sweets out for more than a couple of hours.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Ratio

1:1, 1:2 and 2:1.

1. Make three small ganaches with 50 g of chocolate and 25, 50 and 100 ml of cream. Chill each and compare the texture.

Look for: The first (more chocolate) is firm and fudgy; the middle is a soft, spoonable set; the last is soft and almost liquid. This is why ratio is the whole recipe.

EXPERIMENT

Cream hot or warm

Steaming or boiling.

1. Pour cream that has just started to steam over chocolate, and cream that has boiled hard over another batch.

Look for: The steaming cream gives a smooth, glossy ganache. The boiled cream can make it oily and grainy. Stop heating at steaming.

EXPERIMENT

Stirring speed

Slow or fast.

1. Stir one batch slowly from the centre and whisk another fast.

Look for: The slow batch is glossy and smooth; the fast one is full of air bubbles and less shiny. Slow, steady stirring is best.

EXPERIMENT

Resting time

Wait 2 minutes or stir at once.

1. Stir one batch straight away and leave another to rest for 2 minutes before stirring.

Look for: The rested batch melts evenly with no lumps; the immediately stirred one can have unmelted bits. Patience is a skill.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Rich hot chocolate				
Pourable ganache				
Whipped ganache				
Ganache glaze				
Ratio				
Cream hot or warm				
Stirring speed				
Resting time				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Oily, grainy ganache	Cream too hot, or overstirred	Whisk in a spoon of warm milk
Ganache too thin	Too much cream, or not cooled	Cool it; or melt in more chocolate
Ganache too thick	Too much chocolate	Stir in a spoon of warm cream

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Whipped ganache stiff and grainy	Whisked too long	Whisk only to soft peaks; melt gently and start again
Glaze runs off the cake	Glaze too hot, or cake not cool	Cool the glaze and the cake
Lumps of chocolate	Chunks too big, or not rested	Chop finely and rest before stirring

HOT CREAM, DAIRY AND ALLERGENS

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Dairy-free swap: full-fat coconut cream (the thick part from a chilled tin) and dairy-free dark chocolate make a good ganache, with a coconut flavour. The set is a little softer.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a ganache by pouring hot cream over chopped chocolate.
- ☐ I know which ratio suits a sauce, a filling and a truffle.
- ☐ I heat cream to steaming and not to boiling.
- ☐ I can rescue a split ganache.
- ☐ I can glaze a cake at the right temperature.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 4 is Truffles and Simple Sweets: rolling and coating ganache and making fudge.

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1

Chapter 4 · Truffles and Simple Sweets

SKILL GOAL

Roll and coat ganache into truffles, and make fudge and chocolate clusters.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A truffle is **ganache that has been chilled, rolled and coated**. Once you can make ganache (Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 3), truffles are simply a matter of ratio, chilling and patience, and they make the most impressive-looking sweets for the least effort.

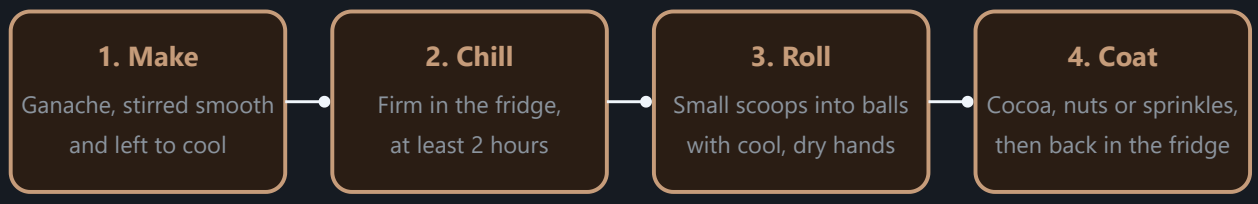


Figure 4. Truffles are ganache that has been chilled firm, rolled and coated.

The method

- **Use a firm ganache:** two parts dark chocolate to one part cream, by weight.
- **Chill for at least 2 hours** until it holds a scoop.
- **Keep your hands cool and dry,** and work quickly: warm hands melt ganache.
- **Roll roughly.** Hand-made truffles are not meant to be perfect.
- **Coat and keep cold,** and serve at cool room temperature.

SWEET	MADE FROM	TEXTURE	KEEPS (FRIDGE OR COOL)
Cocoa truffles	Firm ganache	Soft centre, cocoa coat	About a week, in the fridge
Flavoured truffles	Ganache plus zest, coffee or mint	Soft, flavoured	About a week, in the fridge
Easy fudge	Chocolate and condensed milk	Smooth, firm squares	1 to 2 weeks
Chocolate nuts and seeds	Melted chocolate and pieces	Crunchy clusters	1 to 2 weeks

HOT CREAM, COATINGS AND KEEPING

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Coatings: cocoa powder, finely chopped nuts, desiccated coconut and sprinkles all work. Whole nuts and hard coatings are a choking risk for very young children, and nuts are a serious allergen: keep nut-free truffles apart if anyone has an allergy.

Keeping: truffles contain cream, so keep them in an airtight tin in the fridge for up to about a week (general guidance), and take them out 15 minutes before serving. Don't leave them in a warm room for more than a couple of hours.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Classic cocoa truffles

25 minutes plus 2 hours chilling | about 20 truffles | rolling firm ganache into balls

The classic truffle: a firm 2:1 ganache rolled into rough balls and coated in cocoa. They are meant to look hand-made and a bit uneven.

INGREDIENTS (20 PORTIONS)

200 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), finely chopped
100 ml	double cream
15 g	butter, softened
3 tbsp	cocoa powder, to roll

1. Make the ganache (see Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 3): pour hot cream over the chocolate, wait 2 minutes and stir until smooth. Stir in the butter.
2. Cool, cover and chill for **at least 2 hours**, until firm enough to scoop.
3. Scoop teaspoons of the ganache and roll quickly into balls with cool hands. Roll in the cocoa and put in paper cases. Chill until needed.

HOT CREAM, ROLLING AND KEEPING

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Rolling: ganache is sticky. Chill it until firm, keep your hands cool (rinse them in cold water and dry them), and work quickly. A teaspoon of cocoa on your palms stops it sticking.

Keeping: truffles contain cream, so keep them in an airtight tin in the fridge for up to about a week (general guidance), and take them out 15 minutes before serving. Don't leave them in a warm room for more than a couple of hours.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many

> coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 2 · FLAVOUR

Flavoured truffles: orange, coffee and mint

35 minutes plus chilling | about 20 truffles | flavouring a ganache and coating differently

Divide the ganache into three bowls (or make three small batches) and flavour each: orange zest, instant coffee and peppermint. Match each flavour with its own coating.

INGREDIENTS (20 PORTIONS)

1 batch	classic truffle ganache (above), made and chilled
1	orange, zest only
1 tsp	instant coffee (decaf if you like), dissolved in the hot cream
3 drops	peppermint extract
3 tbsp	chopped nuts, desiccated coconut or sprinkles, to coat

1. Make the ganache as in the classic recipe, dividing the cream into three small pans. Stir the zest into one, the coffee into another and the peppermint extract (a drop at a time, tasting) into the third.
2. Pour each hot cream over a third of the chocolate and stir smooth. Chill all three for **at least 2 hours**.
3. Roll into balls and coat: orange in cocoa, coffee in chopped nuts or coconut, mint in sprinkles.

HOT CREAM, FLAVOURS, COATINGS AND KEEPING

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Flavourings: use real zest, instant coffee or a few drops of peppermint extract (strong, so go carefully). They contain no alcohol, and the aim is a clear flavour behind the chocolate. Check any extract label for alcohol if you want an alcohol-free sweet.

Coatings: cocoa powder, finely chopped nuts, desiccated coconut and sprinkles all work. Whole nuts and hard coatings are a choking risk for very young children, and nuts are a serious allergen: keep nut-free truffles apart if anyone has an allergy.

> **Keeping:** truffles contain cream, so keep them in an airtight tin in the fridge for up to about a week (general guidance), and take them out 15 minutes before serving. Don't leave them in a warm room for more than a couple of hours.

LEVEL 2 · FUDGE

Easy chocolate fudge

15 minutes plus 2 hours setting | about 25 squares | setting chocolate with condensed milk

Real fudge needs sugar boiling, but this version is made with condensed milk and chocolate, melted gently and chilled. It is smooth and rich, and set in a tin and cut in squares.

INGREDIENTS (25 PORTIONS)

300 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), chopped
200 g	sweetened condensed milk
30 g	butter
1 pinch	sea salt
1	15 cm square tin, lined with baking parchment

1. Put the chocolate, condensed milk, butter and salt in a heatproof bowl over barely simmering water, or microwave in 30-second bursts, stirring each time, until completely melted and smooth.
2. Pour into the lined tin and smooth the top. Chill for **at least 2 hours** until firm.
3. Lift out by the parchment and cut into small squares with a sharp, warm knife.

HOT BOWL, KNIFE AND KEEPING

Hot ingredients: condensed milk and melted chocolate in a microwave bowl can be very hot: use oven gloves, and stir carefully. Don't let children handle the hot bowl.

Steam and hot bowls: a bowl over a pan of simmering water gets hot and steam burns. Use oven gloves or a cloth to lift it, keep your face back when you lift it off, and keep children away from the hob.

Knife safety: chop chocolate on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath) with a large knife held firmly, and keep your guiding fingertips tucked back. A serrated knife grips a hard bar better than a smooth blade.

> **Keeping:** fudge made with condensed milk keeps in an airtight tin in a cool place for about 1 to 2 weeks, or in the fridge if the room is warm (general guidance).

LEVEL 3 · COAT

Chocolate-covered nuts or seeds

20 minutes plus 30 minutes setting | 8 portions | coating small pieces in chocolate evenly

Stir small, dry pieces through melted chocolate until every one is coated, then tip onto paper in clusters. A good way to use up nuts, seeds or raisins, and an easy gift.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

100 g	dark or milk chocolate, chopped
150 g	roasted nuts, or sunflower and pumpkin seeds, or raisins
1 pinch	sea salt
1	tray lined with baking parchment

1. Melt the chocolate gently until smooth. Take off the heat and let it cool for 2 minutes.
2. Stir in the nuts or seeds until every piece is coated. Add the salt.
3. Drop spoonfuls onto the tray, or tip onto the paper and break up as it sets. Chill for **30 minutes**.

MELTING, NUTS AND KEEPING

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Nuts: almonds, hazelnuts, pistachios and other nuts (and spreads made from them) are serious allergens, and some chocolate is made in factories that handle nuts. Never serve them to a guest without asking, and make a nut-free swap when anyone has an allergy.

Small children: whole nuts, hard lumps and frozen pieces can be a choking risk for very young children, so keep pieces small and sit with them while they eat.

Nut-free swap: use sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds or raisins, and check the labels for traces of nuts.

> **Keeping:** fudge made with condensed milk keeps in an airtight tin in a cool place for about 1 to 2 weeks, or in the fridge if the room is warm (general guidance).

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Chill time

1, 2 and 4 hours.

1. Try to roll a little of the same ganache after 1, 2 and 4 hours in the fridge.

Look for: At 1 hour it is too soft and sticky; at 2 hours it rolls; at 4 hours it is firm and may need warming in your hands. Plan the chilling.

EXPERIMENT

Scoop size

Small or large.

1. Roll one truffle from a level teaspoon and another from a tablespoon.

Look for: The small truffle is a neat, rich one-bite sweet; the large one is overwhelming and messy. Small is better for a rich ganache.

EXPERIMENT

Coating

Four ways.

1. Roll four truffles from the same batch in cocoa, chopped nuts, coconut and sprinkles.

Look for: Cocoa gives a bitter contrast; nuts add crunch; coconut is sweet and soft; sprinkles are playful. Each changes the whole taste.

EXPERIMENT

Flavour strength

A little or a lot.

1. Add 2 drops and 6 drops of peppermint extract to two small portions of ganache.

Look for: The small amount is a pleasant hint; the large amount is overpowering and medicinal. Add flavour a little at a time and taste.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Cocoa truffles				
Flavoured truffles				
Easy fudge				
Chocolate nuts or seeds				
Chill time				
Scoop size				
Coating				
Flavour strength				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Ganache too soft to roll	Not chilled enough	Chill another hour
Truffles too hard	Chilled very cold	Stand for 10 minutes at room temperature

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Sticky hands	Warm hands	Cool your hands; dust with cocoa
Greasy truffles	Cream too hot (split)	Rescue with a spoon of warm milk; see Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 3
Fudge won't set	Too little chocolate	Chill longer; use more chocolate next time
Coating falls off	Truffle too dry or cold	Roll while still slightly tacky

HOT CREAM, NUTS AND ALLERGENS

Hot cream: cream heated to steaming is hotter than it looks and burns skin. Heat it in a small pan over a medium heat until it just starts to steam at the edges, don't let it boil over, keep the handle turned in and pour with care.

Nuts: almonds, hazelnuts, pistachios and other nuts (and spreads made from them) are serious allergens, and some chocolate is made in factories that handle nuts. Never serve them to a guest without asking, and make a nut-free swap when anyone has an allergy.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can chill ganache until it is ready to roll.
- ☐ I can roll and coat truffles with cool hands.
- ☐ I can flavour ganache and taste as I go.
- ☐ I can make fudge and cut it neatly.
- ☐ I can keep truffles safely in the fridge.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 5 is Brownies and Blondies: fudgy and cakey bakes.

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1

Chapter 5 · Brownies and Blondies

SKILL GOAL

Bake four brownie-style bakes and control fudgy against cakey by flour and baking time.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Brownies and blondies are the friendliest chocolate bakes: **one bowl, no creaming, no rising**. The skill is in the balance. More chocolate, butter and egg and little flour gives a fudgy brownie; more flour and a little baking powder give a cakey one. Cooking time then decides how fudgy it ends up.

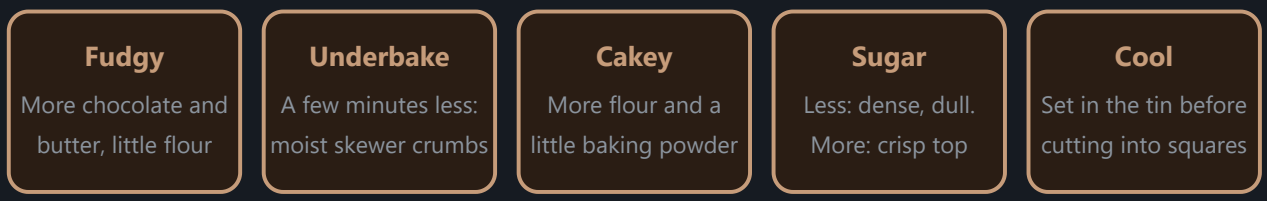


Figure 5. The difference between fudgy and cakey is mostly flour and baking time.

The method

- **Line the tin** so the whole bake lifts out and cuts cleanly.
- **Cool the melted chocolate** before adding the eggs.
- **Mix gently,** just until the flour disappears: too much beating makes a tough brownie.
- **Underbake slightly.** A brownie sets as it cools, so take it out while the middle still wobbles.
- **Cool completely in the tin** before cutting, or chill it for neat edges.

BAKE	FLAVOUR	TEXTURE	CHECK IT'S DONE
Cocoa brownies	Strong cocoa	Fudgy, crinkly top	Moist crumbs on a skewer
Melted-chocolate brownies	Deep, rich chocolate	Dense, glossy	Set edges, slight wobble
Blondies	Caramel, vanilla	Soft, chewy	Golden, soft middle
Swirl brownies	Chocolate and tangy cheese	Fudgy with a creamy swirl	Set, slight wobble; chill

RAW BATTER, HOT OVEN AND KEEPING

Raw batter: don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.

Hot oven: use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Keeping: store baked treats in an airtight tin at room temperature for about 3 to 4 days (general guidance), or freeze them wrapped for up to about a month. Anything with a cream cheese or cream filling belongs in the fridge.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

One-bowl cocoa brownies

15 minutes plus 25 minutes baking | 16 squares | mixing a brownie batter in one bowl

The easiest brownie: melted butter, sugar, eggs and cocoa stirred in one bowl, with no chocolate to melt. They are fudgy and a little crinkly on top. Stir until just combined and no more.

INGREDIENTS (16 PORTIONS)

100 g	butter, melted
200 g	caster sugar
2	Lion-marked eggs
1 tsp	vanilla extract
50 g	cocoa powder, sifted
60 g	plain flour
1 pinch	salt
1	20 cm square tin, lined

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan) and line the tin. Mix the melted butter and sugar in a bowl, then beat in the eggs and vanilla.
2. Sift in the cocoa, flour and salt and stir gently until just combined and no streaks of flour remain.
3. Pour into the tin and level. Bake for **22 to 25 minutes**, until the top is set and a skewer comes out with a few moist crumbs. Cool completely in the tin.

> **RAW BATTER, HOT OVEN, COOLING AND KEEPING**
>
> **Raw batter:** don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.
>
> **Hot oven:** use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Cooling and cutting: let a bake cool in its tin so it sets, lift it out by the parchment, and cut with a sharp knife wiped clean between cuts. Don't cut hot brownies: they fall apart and burn.

Keeping: store baked treats in an airtight tin at room temperature for about 3 to 4 days (general guidance), or freeze them wrapped for up to about a month. Anything with a cream cheese or cream filling belongs in the fridge.

LEVEL 2 · MELTED CHOCOLATE

Melted-chocolate brownies

20 minutes plus 25 minutes baking | 16 squares | melting chocolate and butter into a batter

Real chocolate melted with butter gives a deeper, glossier, fudgier brownie than cocoa alone. Let the melted mixture cool a little before adding the eggs, or they scramble.

INGREDIENTS (16 PORTIONS)

150 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), chopped
150 g	butter
200 g	caster sugar
3	Lion-marked eggs
100 g	plain flour
1 pinch	salt
1	20 cm square tin, lined

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan) and line the tin. Melt the chocolate and butter gently over barely simmering water, stir smooth and cool for 5 minutes.
2. Whisk in the sugar, then the eggs one at a time. Fold in the flour and salt until just combined.
3. Pour into the tin and bake for **23 to 26 minutes**, until the edges are set and the middle still has a slight wobble. Cool completely in the tin.

MELTING, RAW BATTER AND HOT OVEN

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Raw batter: don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.

Hot oven: use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof

surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Cooling and cutting: let a bake cool in its tin so it sets, lift it out by the parchment, and cut with a sharp knife wiped clean between cuts. Don't cut hot brownies: they fall apart and burn.

LEVEL 2 · BLONDE

Blondies

20 minutes plus 25 minutes baking | 16 squares | making a cakey bake without cocoa

A blondie is a brownie without the cocoa: brown sugar and butter give a caramel flavour, with chocolate chunks through it. The centre should still be soft when you take it out, as it sets while cooling.

INGREDIENTS (16 PORTIONS)

125 g	butter, melted and cooled
175 g	light brown sugar
2	Lion-marked eggs
1 tsp	vanilla extract
150 g	plain flour
1/2 tsp	baking powder
100 g	white or milk chocolate chunks
1 pinch	salt
1	20 cm square tin, lined

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan) and line the tin. Whisk the butter and sugar, then beat in the eggs and vanilla.
2. Fold in the flour, baking powder and salt until just combined, then the chocolate chunks.
3. Spread in the tin and bake for **22 to 25 minutes**, until golden on top with a soft middle. Cool in the tin before cutting.

> **RAW BATTER, HOT OVEN AND KEEPING**
>
> **Raw batter:** don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.
>
> **Hot oven:** use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry

quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Cooling and cutting: let a bake cool in its tin so it sets, lift it out by the parchment, and cut with a sharp knife wiped clean between cuts. Don't cut hot brownies: they fall apart and burn.

Keeping: store baked treats in an airtight tin at room temperature for about 3 to 4 days (general guidance), or freeze them wrapped for up to about a month. Anything with a cream cheese or cream filling belongs in the fridge.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 3 · SWIRL

Cream cheese swirl brownies

30 minutes plus 30 minutes baking | 16 squares | swirling two batters in one tin

A tangy cream cheese mixture swirled through brownie batter makes a marbled top. Drop the cheese mixture in spoonfuls and drag a knife through only two or three times, or the colours blend into brown.

INGREDIENTS (16 PORTIONS)

1 batch	melted-chocolate brownie batter (above)
150 g	full-fat cream cheese
40 g	caster sugar
1	Lion-marked egg yolk
1 tsp	vanilla extract
1	20 cm square tin, lined

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan), line the tin and make the brownie batter. Beat the cream cheese, sugar, egg yolk and vanilla until smooth.
2. Pour the brownie batter into the tin and level it. Drop spoonfuls of the cream cheese mixture on top.
3. Drag a knife through the two mixtures **two or three times**. Bake for **30 to 35 minutes**, until set with a slight wobble. Cool in the tin, then chill before cutting.

CREAM CHEESE, RAW BATTER AND HOT OVEN

Cream cheese swirl: use full-fat cream cheese straight from the fridge. A swirl brownie contains cream cheese and egg yolk, so keep it in the fridge and eat it within about 3 days (general guidance).

Raw batter: don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.

Hot oven: use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

> **Cooling and cutting:** let a bake cool in its tin so it sets, lift it out by the parchment, and cut with a sharp knife wiped clean between cuts. Don't cut hot brownies: they fall apart and burn.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Cooking time

20, 25 and 30 minutes.

1. Bake three small tins of the same brownie batter for 20, 25 and 30 minutes. Cool and cut each.

Look for: The shortest is gooey and may sink; the middle is fudgy; the longest is dry and cakey. Note the time that you like in your oven.

EXPERIMENT

Sugar amount

Less or more.

1. Make one batch with 150 g and another with 250 g of sugar, keeping everything else the same.

Look for: The low-sugar brownie is dense and bitter with a dull top; the high-sugar one has a crisp shiny crust and is very sweet. Aim in the middle.

EXPERIMENT

Flour amount

Fudgy or cakey.

1. Make a batch with 60 g of flour and another with 120 g, plus a pinch of baking powder.

Look for: The first is fudgy and dense; the second is lighter and cake-like. Flour is the lever for texture.

EXPERIMENT

Cooling time

Warm, cool and chilled.

1. Cut a square warm from the oven, another after 1 hour and another after chilling overnight.

Look for: The warm square collapses; the cooled one holds its shape; the chilled one is the fudgiest and cuts cleanly. Patience gives neater brownies.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Cocoa brownies				
Melted-chocolate brownies				
Blondies				
Swirl brownies				
Cooking time				
Sugar amount				
Flour amount				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Cooling time				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Dry, cakey brownie	Overbaked, or too much flour	Bake a few minutes less; measure flour carefully
Raw middle that won't set	Underbaked or tin too small	Bake longer in a 20 cm tin; check the oven
No shiny crust	Sugar not beaten with eggs	Whisk the sugar and eggs well
Greasy brownie	Butter too hot, or too much	Cool the butter; measure
Falls apart when cut	Cut while warm	Cool completely or chill
Swirl blended to brown	Over-swirled	Swirl just two or three times

RAW BATTER, HOT OVEN AND ALLERGENS

Raw batter: don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.

Hot oven: use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can make a one-bowl brownie batter.

☐ I can melt chocolate and cool it before adding eggs.

☐ I know when to take a brownie out of the oven.

☐ I can swirl two batters without blending them.

☐ I cool bakes fully before cutting.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 6 is Cakes, Cookies and Warm Puddings: creaming, whisking, and a soft-centred fondant.

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1

Chapter 6 · Cakes, Cookies and Warm Puddings

SKILL GOAL

Bake cookies, a cake and two warm puddings, and learn how to tell when each is done.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Three families of chocolate bakes in one chapter, each with a different method: **creaming** (cookies), **whisking** (the one-bowl cake) and **timing** (warm puddings, where the middle is the point). Learn the sign that each is done, because minutes alone are not enough: every oven is different.



Figure 6. Each bake has its own sign that it is done. Learn the sign, not just the minutes.

The method

- **Cookies:** cream the butter and sugar until pale, mix the flour in gently, and take them out while the middles look under-done.
- **Cake:** the batter can be thin. Test with a skewer, and cool before icing.
- **Saucy pudding:** pour the boiling water over the back of a spoon, and don't stir.
- **Fondant:** butter and cocoa-dust the ramekins, bake until the edge is set and the middle wobbles, and turn out after a minute.
- **Check early** and keep a note of what your oven does.

BAKE	METHOD	OVEN	DONE WHEN
Cookies	Creaming	180°C (160°C fan), 10 to 12 minutes	Golden edges, pale soft middle
One-bowl cake	Whisking	180°C (160°C fan), 30 to 35 minutes	Skewer clean
Self-saucing pudding	Batter and sauce	180°C (160°C fan), 30 minutes	Risen, springy, sauce below
Fondant	Whisked eggs and melted chocolate	200°C (180°C fan), 10 to 12 minutes	Set edge, wobbly middle

RAW BATTER, HOT OVEN AND SOFT CENTRES

Raw batter: don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.

Hot oven: use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Soft centres: a fondant or lava-style pudding is deliberately not fully set in the middle, so the egg is only lightly cooked. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, and check current FSA advice before serving it to pregnant women, babies, older people or anyone unwell. For them, bake it 3 to 4 minutes longer until set.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Chocolate chip cookies

20 minutes plus 12 minutes baking | 12 cookies | creaming butter and sugar and baking until the edges set

Creaming butter and sugar traps air for a tender cookie, and the two sugars give chewiness and crisp edges. Take them out while the centres still look pale and soft: they firm up as they cool.

INGREDIENTS (12 PORTIONS)

115 g	butter, softened
100 g	light brown sugar
50 g	caster sugar
1	Lion-marked egg
1 tsp	vanilla extract
190 g	plain flour
1/2 tsp	bicarbonate of soda
1/2 tsp	salt
150 g	chocolate chunks (dark, milk or a mix)

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan) and line two trays. Beat the butter and both sugars for 2 minutes until pale and fluffy, then beat in the egg and vanilla.
2. Stir in the flour, bicarbonate and salt until just combined, then fold in the chocolate chunks.
3. Roll into 12 balls, space them well apart (see the box) and bake for **10 to 12 minutes**, until the edges are golden and the middles pale. Cool on the tray for 5 minutes.

> **RAW DOUGH, HOT OVEN, SPACING AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Raw batter:** don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.
>
> **Hot oven:** use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry

quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Spacing cookies: put the dough balls at least 5 cm apart on a lined tray, because they spread. Bake one tray at a time on the middle shelf, and let the cookies firm up on the tray for 5 minutes before moving them.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 2 · WHISK

One-bowl chocolate cake

20 minutes plus 35 minutes baking | 10 slices | whisking a thin batter and finishing with ganache

A moist, dark cake with no creaming and one bowl. The batter is thin, which is right: it bakes into a tender crumb. Cool it completely before the ganache glaze goes on.

INGREDIENTS (10 PORTIONS)

150 g	plain flour
150 g	caster sugar
35 g	cocoa powder
1 1/2 tsp	baking powder
1/2 tsp	bicarbonate of soda
2	Lion-marked eggs
100 ml	flavourless oil
150 ml	milk
100 ml	hot water
1 tsp	vanilla extract
1 batch	pourable or glaze ganache (Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 3)

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Grease and line a 20 cm round tin. Sift the flour, sugar, cocoa, baking powder and bicarbonate into a bowl.
2. Whisk in the eggs, oil, milk and vanilla until smooth, then whisk in the hot water. The batter will be thin.
3. Pour into the tin and bake for **30 to 35 minutes**, until a skewer comes out clean. Cool completely, then pour over the ganache glaze and leave to set.

> **RAW BATTER, HOT WATER, HOT OVEN AND CAKE TESTING**
>
> **Raw batter:** don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.

Hot oven: use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Testing a cake: a skewer pushed into the middle should come out clean or with a few dry crumbs. Don't open the oven in the first 25 minutes, or the cake can sink. Cool in the tin for 10 minutes, then on a wire rack.

Keeping: store baked treats in an airtight tin at room temperature for about 3 to 4 days (general guidance), or freeze them wrapped for up to about a month. Anything with a cream cheese or cream filling belongs in the fridge.

LEVEL 2 · SAUCY

Self-saucing chocolate pudding

15 minutes plus 30 minutes baking | 4 to 6 portions | baking a pudding that makes its own sauce

A sponge batter in a dish, with sugar and cocoa on top and boiling water poured over. In the oven the sponge rises to the top and the sugar and water sink to make a glossy sauce underneath. It seems backwards, but it works.

INGREDIENTS (5 PORTIONS)

100 g	plain flour
75 g	caster sugar
2 tbsp	cocoa powder
2 tsp	baking powder
120 ml	milk
40 g	butter, melted
1	Lion-marked egg
1 tsp	vanilla extract
75 g	light brown sugar, for the topping
2 tbsp	cocoa powder, for the topping
250 ml	boiling water
1	1.2 litre ovenproof dish, buttered

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Mix the flour, caster sugar, cocoa and baking powder in a bowl, then stir in the milk, melted butter, egg and vanilla until smooth. Pour into the buttered dish.
2. Mix the brown sugar and cocoa for the topping and scatter it evenly over the batter. Pour the boiling water gently over the back of a spoon on top. **Don't stir.**
3. Bake for **30 minutes**, until the sponge is risen and springy with sauce underneath. Rest for 5 minutes, then spoon out, with the sauce, onto warm plates.

> **BOILING WATER, HOT OVEN, RAW BATTER AND HOT DISH**

Boiling water: the self-saucing pudding is topped with boiling water. Pour it gently over the back of a spoon with the dish on the oven shelf or a stable tray, never carry a full dish of hot liquid across the kitchen, and keep children away.

Hot oven: use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Raw batter: don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 3 · FONDANT

Chocolate fondant

25 minutes plus 12 minutes baking | 4 puddings | baking a pudding with a soft, flowing centre

A small, rich pudding with a crust outside and a warm, molten middle. It is all about timing: a minute too long and the centre sets. Make the batter ahead, bake straight from the fridge, and practise on one first.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

100 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), chopped
100 g	butter, plus extra for the ramekins
2	Lion-marked eggs
2	Lion-marked egg yolks
50 g	caster sugar
1 tbsp	plain flour
1 tbsp	cocoa powder, to dust the ramekins
4	ramekins (about 150 ml each)

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Butter four ramekins thickly and dust with cocoa. Melt the chocolate and butter gently and cool for 5 minutes.
2. Whisk the eggs, yolks and sugar until thick and pale, then fold in the chocolate mixture and the flour.
3. Divide between the ramekins on a tray and bake for **10 to 12 minutes**, until the edges are set and the middle wobbles. Rest for 1 minute, run a knife round, turn out onto a plate and serve at once.

SOFT CENTRES, HOT RAMEKINS, HOT OVEN AND MELTING

Soft centres: a fondant or lava-style pudding is deliberately not fully set in the middle, so the egg is only lightly cooked. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, and check current FSA advice before serving it to pregnant women, babies, older people or anyone unwell. For them, bake it 3 to 4 minutes longer until set.

Ramekins: butter them thickly and dust with cocoa so the pudding slides out. Stand them on a

baking tray and handle them with oven gloves, because the china stays hot for a long time.

Hot oven: use oven gloves, open the door away from your face, and put the tin on a heatproof surface. Don't leave the oven unattended, because chocolate bakes go from perfect to dry quickly, and every oven is a little different, so check early.

Gentle heat: chocolate scorches easily and turns dull and bitter. Melt it in a heatproof bowl over (not touching) barely simmering water, or in the microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Take it off the heat when it is mostly melted and stir until smooth. Milk and white chocolate burn faster than dark, so use lower heat for them.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Cocoa or melted chocolate

In the cake.

1. Make half the cake batter with cocoa as written, and another half with 50 g of melted chocolate swapped in for 15 g of the cocoa and a little of the oil. Compare.

Look for: The cocoa cake is lighter and more cakey; the melted-chocolate one is denser and richer. Both are good: cocoa for a light cake, chocolate for depth.

EXPERIMENT

Oven temperature

Hot or lower.

1. Bake one tray of cookies at 180°C (160°C fan) and another at 160°C (140°C fan), watching the time.

Look for: The hotter tray gives crisp edges and soft middles; the cooler gives flatter, even, crisper cookies. Choose by the texture you like.

EXPERIMENT

Resting the dough

Straight away or chilled.

1. Bake half of the cookie dough at once and chill the other half for 1 hour before baking.

Look for: The chilled dough spreads less and tastes deeper; the fresh dough spreads wider and is thinner. Chilling is worth the wait.

EXPERIMENT

Fondant timing

9, 11 and 13 minutes.

1. Bake three fondants for 9, 11 and 13 minutes, and turn each out after a minute.

Look for: The shortest may collapse as a puddle; the middle one flows; the longest is set all through, like a small cake. Find your oven's number.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Chocolate chip cookies				
One-bowl chocolate cake				
Self-saucing pudding				
Chocolate fondant				
Cocoa or melted chocolate				
Oven temperature				
Resting the dough				
Fondant timing				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Flat, greasy cookies	Butter too soft or oven too cool	Use softened (not melted) butter; chill the dough
Hard cookies	Overbaked	Take them out while the middles look soft
Cake sinks in the middle	Oven opened early, or underbaked	Keep the door shut for 25 minutes; test with a skewer
Dry cake	Overbaked	Bake until the skewer is just clean
Pudding has no sauce	Water was stirred in, or poured too hard	Pour gently over a spoon; don't stir
Fondant won't turn out	Ramekins not buttered and dusted	Butter thickly and dust with cocoa; rest 1 minute

RAW BATTER, SOFT CENTRES AND ALLERGENS

Raw batter: don't eat raw brownie, cake or cookie mixture. It contains raw egg and raw flour, which can carry harmful bacteria. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, wash your hands after handling raw egg, and bake it fully.

Soft centres: a fondant or lava-style pudding is deliberately not fully set in the middle, so the egg is only lightly cooked. Use eggs with the British Lion mark, and check current FSA advice before serving it to pregnant women, babies, older people or anyone unwell. For them, bake it 3 to 4 minutes longer until set.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can cream butter and sugar and bake a cookie.

☐ I can make and test a one-bowl cake.

☐ I can make a pudding that sauces itself.

☐ I can bake a fondant and turn it out.

☐ I know the sign that each bake is done.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 7 is A Chocolate Gift Box: making, packing and labelling a box of treats.

Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1

Chapter 7 · A Chocolate Gift Box

SKILL GOAL

Plan, make, pack and label a chocolate gift box, and start your own set of house recipes.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A chocolate gift box is the course capstone: **make several treats ahead, pack them well and label them clearly**. It ties together melting, dipping, ganache, truffles and baking (Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapters 1 to 6), and adds the new skills of planning, keeping and packing.



Figure 7. Plan backwards from the gift: dry things first, cream things last, and everything labelled.

The method

- **Choose a mix** of textures: something crisp (bark), something soft (truffles), something baked (brownie) and something to drink (the mix).
- **Plan backwards** from the day you give the box, and put the cream-based treats last.
- **Pack in layers,** with parchment between them and truffles in paper cases.

- **Label everything:** what it is, the date and the allergens.
- **Keep it cool** until it is handed over.

TREAT	KEEPS	WHERE	MAKE
Hot chocolate mix	2 to 3 months	Cool, dry jar	Weeks ahead
Bark	1 to 2 weeks	Airtight tin, cool	3 to 5 days ahead
Brownie squares	3 to 4 days	Airtight tin	3 days ahead
Truffles	About a week	Fridge until given	2 days ahead

These keeping times are general guidance, not strict limits.

LABELS, COLD CHAIN AND ALLERGENS

Labelling gifts: label every gift with what is in it, the date it was made, and any allergens (milk, egg, nuts, wheat, soy), and say 'keep in the fridge' on anything with cream. If you give food to someone with an allergy, check with them first.

Keep it cool: truffles and anything with cream must stay in the fridge until just before the gift is given, and should be eaten within about a week (general guidance). Tell the person receiving them, and don't leave a gift box in a warm car or on a radiator.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Hot chocolate mix in a jar

10 minutes | about 4 mugs | mixing a dry mix and writing a label

A hot chocolate mix is the simplest gift: dry ingredients shaken in a jar with a label that says how to use it. The grated chocolate melts into the hot milk and gives it body.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

60 g	caster sugar
30 g	cocoa powder, sifted
40 g	full-fat milk powder
50 g	dark chocolate (about 70%), finely grated
1 pinch	salt
1	clean, dry 500 ml jar with a lid

1. Sift the cocoa into a bowl and stir in the sugar, milk powder, grated chocolate and salt until evenly mixed.
2. Spoon into the jar and close the lid. Shake gently.
3. Add a label: 'Hot chocolate: stir 3 heaped tablespoons into 250 ml of hot milk. Made [date]. Contains milk (and may contain soy and nuts).'

LABELS, ALLERGENS AND KEEPING

Labelling gifts: label every gift with what is in it, the date it was made, and any allergens (milk, egg, nuts, wheat, soy), and say 'keep in the fridge' on anything with cream. If you give food to someone with an allergy, check with them first.

Keeping the mix: a dry hot chocolate mix keeps in a clean, dry, airtight jar in a cool cupboard for about 2 to 3 months (general guidance). Milk powder and grated chocolate can clump in damp air, so keep the lid on.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many

coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

LEVEL 1 · PACK

A bark gift bag

30 minutes | 1 gift | wrapping a treat so it arrives intact and clearly labelled

Pack a batch of bark in a clear bag or tin with a label. This is the practice for packing: dry sweets, parchment between layers, a clear label with the date and allergens.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1 batch	chocolate bark (Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 2)
1	cellophane bag or small tin
1	ribbon and a label

1. Break the bark into even pieces and let them come to room temperature. Lay a sheet of baking parchment in the tin or bag.
2. Layer the pieces with parchment between layers so they don't stick. Close the bag or tin.
3. Tie with ribbon and add a label with what it is, the date and allergens. Keep somewhere cool until it is given.

PACKING AND LABELS

Labelling gifts: label every gift with what is in it, the date it was made, and any allergens (milk, egg, nuts, wheat, soy), and say 'keep in the fridge' on anything with cream. If you give food to someone with an allergy, check with them first.

Jars and tins: wash jars and tins in hot soapy water and dry them completely before filling. Use baking parchment between layers so sweets don't stick or smudge.

Small children: whole nuts, hard lumps and frozen pieces can be a choking risk for very young children, so keep pieces small and sit with them while they eat.

LEVEL 2 · BOX

A four-treat gift box

Several short sessions | 4 boxes | making, timing and packing several treats

A box holding four treats: truffles, brownie squares, bark and a small bag of hot chocolate mix. Make the dry things first and the cream things last, and keep the truffles chilled until the box is handed over.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1 batch	classic cocoa truffles (Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 4)
1 batch	brownie squares (Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 5)
1 batch	chocolate bark (Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1, chapter 2)
1 batch	hot chocolate mix (above)
4	small gift boxes or tins, with baking parchment
4	labels

1. Plan backwards from the day you give the boxes (see the diagram): hot chocolate mix first, bark and brownies a few days before, truffles two days before.
2. Cut brownies into small squares and wrap the truffles, bark and mix. Line each box with parchment and arrange the treats, with the truffles in paper cases.
3. Add a label to each box listing the treats, the date and allergens, and 'truffles: keep in the fridge'. Keep the boxes cool until given.

COLD CHAIN, LABELS AND ALLERGENS

Keep it cool: truffles and anything with cream must stay in the fridge until just before the gift is given, and should be eaten within about a week (general guidance). Tell the person receiving them, and don't leave a gift box in a warm car or on a radiator.

Labelling gifts: label every gift with what is in it, the date it was made, and any allergens (milk, egg, nuts, wheat, soy), and say 'keep in the fridge' on anything with cream. If you give food to someone with an allergy, check with them first.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark

chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

Keeping: store baked treats in an airtight tin at room temperature for about 3 to 4 days (general guidance), or freeze them wrapped for up to about a month. Anything with a cream cheese or cream filling belongs in the fridge.

LEVEL 3 · HOUSE TREAT

Your flavour notebook and house treat

Planning 20 minutes; making depends on the recipe | 4 portions | adapting a recipe into one that is yours

Choose the treat you liked best, change one thing and write down the result. Over time your notebook becomes a set of house recipes: a base, a flavour, a coating and a note about what you'd change.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	notebook for your chocolate notes
1 batch	the chocolate treat you liked best from this course
1	one new flavour, topping or coating to try

1. Pick your favourite treat from the course and write the recipe in your notebook with the date.
2. Change **one** thing only: the flavour, the cocoa percentage, a coating or a swirl. Make a small batch.
3. Taste with someone, write down what you would change, and repeat until you are happy. Then name it and write it on a label.

ALLERGENS IN NEW RECIPES

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy, and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

Nuts: almonds, hazelnuts, pistachios and other nuts (and spreads made from them) are serious allergens, and some chocolate is made in factories that handle nuts. Never serve them to a guest without asking, and make a nut-free swap when anyone has an allergy.

Labelling gifts: label every gift with what is in it, the date it was made, and any allergens (milk, egg, nuts, wheat, soy), and say 'keep in the fridge' on anything with cream. If you give food to someone with an allergy, check with them first.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

A timed gift box

Plan against the clock.

1. Write the full plan for four boxes, follow it, and note how long each job took.

Look for: The real times usually differ from the plan: chilling and cooling take longer than you think. Adjust the plan for next time.

EXPERIMENT

Swap one treat

Same box, one change.

1. Replace one treat with another, for example flavoured truffles instead of bark, and see how the box feels.

Look for: A swap changes the balance: two soft treats feel rich and heavy, while something crisp lightens the box. Note which you prefer.

EXPERIMENT

Your own chocolate treat

One change at a time.

1. Change just one thing in your favourite recipe (cocoa percentage, flavour, coating or swirl) and make a small batch.

Look for: Changing one thing makes it clear what each change does. Write it in your notebook and name the result.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Hot chocolate mix				
Bark gift bag				
Four-treat box				
House treat				
Timed gift box				
Swap one treat				
Your own treat				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Truffles soft in the box	Kept warm	Keep in the fridge until given; pack with a cold pack
Treats stuck together	No parchment between layers	Layer with parchment; let sweets set first
Brownies dry out	Not airtight	Wrap squares well in an airtight tin
Bark has white streaks	Bloom from warmth	Harmless; keep cooler next time
Mix clumps	Damp jar or air	Dry the jar completely and keep the lid on
A guest has an allergy	No label or ingredient check	Label every item and ask before you give

COLD CHAIN, LABELS AND ALLERGENS

Keep it cool: truffles and anything with cream must stay in the fridge until just before the gift is given, and should be eaten within about a week (general guidance). Tell the person receiving them, and don't leave a gift box in a warm car or on a radiator.

Labelling gifts: label every gift with what is in it, the date it was made, and any allergens (milk, egg, nuts, wheat, soy), and say 'keep in the fridge' on anything with cream. If you give food to someone with an allergy, check with them first.

Allergens: chocolate contains milk (except some dark), and often soy (lecithin) and sometimes nuts or traces of them: check the label and the 'may contain' line. Cream, butter and many coatings are dairy,

and cookies and biscuits contain wheat and often egg. Dairy-free dark chocolate and coconut cream can replace the dairy in many recipes, but the texture changes.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can plan a gift box backwards from the day I give it.
- ☐ I can pack treats in layers so they arrive intact.
- ☐ I label every gift with the date and allergens.
- ☐ I keep cream-based treats cold until given.
- ☐ I have written down my own house treat.

NEXT CHAPTER

This is the last chapter of Cooking Skills: Chocolate 1. Cooking Skills: Chocolate 2 (planned) will go on to tempering, bonbons, mousses and more advanced baking.