

A Simple Method Tempering

BY MARK GRAY

We've all been seduced by the sight of chocolate candies nestled in a box. Take a bite; the candy breaks with a crisp, clean snap, and the chocolate melts smoothly on your tongue. Most people think that this kind of candy can only be made by professional candy makers. But the truth is that beautiful chocolate candies, as good as any you can buy, are really quite easy to make.

The process responsible for chocolate's smooth texture and bright sheen is known as tempering. But open any book on candy making and you'll usually find the same advice for tempering chocolate—don't do it! Tempering, the experts warn, is not suited for home cooks. This may be true for traditional tempering, in which melted chocolate is poured onto a marble slab and worked until it reaches the proper temperature. But there's a much easier technique, called the pot method, that I think works just fine.

Begin tempering by slowly melting the chopped chocolate over a bowl of hot water, and stir until smooth.



Photos: Ellen Silverman

Make
shiny, mouth-
watering
chocolate
candies with
this easy-
to-master
technique

for Chocolate

WHAT IS TEMPERING?

To understand tempering, it helps to understand a bit about chocolate. All chocolate contains cocoa butter, the ivory-colored fat in cocoa beans that's responsible for chocolate's rich flavor and smooth texture. Depending on the type and brand of chocolate you choose, the cocoa-butter content may range from 25% to more than 50%.

All the chocolate you buy has been tempered, but once melted, the temper is lost, and the process must be repeated. When tempered, chocolate is heated to a temperature high enough to melt the cocoa butter and then carefully cooled to a point at which the cocoa butter forms stable crystals. These stable crystals give chocolate its glossy sheen and smooth texture. If unstable crystals form, the chocolate will be slow to set, grainy, dull, and covered with white streaks of cocoa butter.

POT-TEMPERING MEANS WATCHING THE HEAT

A good thermometer is crucial for proper tempering. Look for one with an 80° to 130°F range that's meas-

ured in 1-degree increments, called a chocolate thermometer. Standard candy or frying thermometers can't do the job, since they start to register at 100°.

The pot-tempering method. Chop three-quarters of the total amount chocolate you plan to use; leave one-quarter of it in a chunk. Put the chopped chocolate in a bowl set over hot, not simmering, water. The bowl should not touch the water, and there must be no steam that could come into contact with and ruin the chocolate. When you remove the bowl from the water bath, be sure to dry the bottom of the bowl completely. It's important to keep the work surface—and anything else that might come into contact with the chocolate—absolutely dry. Chocolate melts best when it melts slowly. Overheating can cause the solids in the chocolate to separate from the fat and clump together.

Put the thermometer in the chocolate and watch closely: dark chocolate separates at 120°; milk chocolate and white chocolate separate at 110°. Stir the chopped chocolate and, when completely melted, remove it from the heat and let it cool slightly. Add the remaining chunk of chocolate and

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH CHOCOLATE

Keep these guidelines in mind whenever you're cooking with chocolate.

- ◆ Work in an absolutely clean, grease- and odor-free area.
- ◆ Make sure the temperature of the room isn't too hot or too cold (68° is ideal; no higher than 72°).
- ◆ Remember, chocolate is an oil-based product, and oil and water don't mix. The slightest amount of water or steam can ruin a bowl of chocolate. Everything that comes in contact with your chocolate—tools, work area, or other ingredients—must be absolutely dry.

Remove the melted chocolate from the heat and stir to cool slightly before adding the remaining chunk of chocolate.



Watch the thermometer. As soon as the chocolate reaches the proper temperature (see chart p. 66), remove any that's unmelted.





This chocolate bark is loaded with nuts. The version pictured here is made with white chocolate and hazelnuts, but any type of chocolate or nut works well.

continue stirring. Depending on the type of chocolate used (see the chart below), you want to bring it down to a temperature between 84° and 91°. When the chocolate reaches the appropriate temperature range, remove any unmelted chocolate. If the chocolate melts completely but the mixture is still too warm, continue stirring until it reaches the proper temperature. If your chocolate drops below the proper temperature, remove a small amount of the chocolate and reheat it carefully. Then slowly add that warm chocolate back into the cooled chocolate and stir until the mixture reaches the correct temperature. If the chocolate looks streaky, you'll have to start over (but you can use the same chocolate).

TESTING THE TEMPER

Experienced candy makers test the temper by putting a small amount of the chocolate on their lip. If it isn't cold or hot, but tepid, the chocolate is in temper. Home cooks should try this test, too, to help them understand the process better, but they should also use a more reliable test. Simply spread a dab of chocolate on a piece of foil or parchment and refrigerate it for no longer than two minutes. If no streaks appear, and the chocolate is evenly glossy, it's ready to use.

Hold your temper. Once tempered, you'll need to keep the chocolate at a relatively even temperature for as long as possible while you make your candies. There are a few ways to do this. One method is to set the bowl of tempered chocolate on a heating pad set at the lowest temperature. (Cover the pad with heavy-duty plastic wrap if you're

concerned about keeping it clean.) As you work, stir the chocolate occasionally, and if it cools too much, simply increase the temperature by adjusting the heat setting. You can replace the used portions of tempered chocolate with melted lukewarm chocolate. This will not only maintain the supply, but it will also keep the chocolate fluid. Be careful not to add too much untempered chocolate at one time, or you'll take the whole batch out of temper.

The candy recipes I'm giving here are all quite easy to make. None require molds or complicated fillings—perfect for beginning candy makers. All of them can be stored for about three to four weeks in an airtight, odor-free container.

STORING EXTRA CHOCOLATE

If you have any chocolate left over when you've finished making your candies, you can save it and use it again. Simply clean the sides of the bowl and allow the chocolate to solidify completely. Turn the bowl upside down and tap the bottom: the chocolate should fall right out. Wrap the chocolate in plastic wrap and store it in a cool, dry place. It can be safely retempered next time you make candy.

Pecan-Nougat Chocolates

These candies are quite easy to make, but the taste—crunchy, caramelized pecans and dark chocolate—is pure elegance. *Yields about 36 candies.*

3/4 cup sugar
3/4 cup toasted pecans
1 lb. good-quality chocolate



Caramel-clad pecans crushed to a fine powder makes a sweet and shiny topping to Pecan-Nougat Clusters.

TEMPERATURE RANGES FOR TEMPERED CHOCOLATE

The temperature ranges here indicate the point at which the tempering is complete. To maintain the proper temperature, keep the chocolate set over a bowl of warm water. If the temperature falls below the range indicated here, the chocolate will be too thick to form a smooth coating; if it rises above the proper temperature, the chocolate will have to be retempered.

Semisweet and bittersweet chocolate	86° to 91°F
Milk chocolate	84° to 86°F
White chocolate	84° to 86°F

CHOOSING CHOCOLATE

When tempering chocolate, quality matters. The chocolate chips you love in cookies don't have enough cocoa butter to temper well. Professional candy makers choose *couverture* chocolate. The term refers to professional-quality chocolate that

has a higher percentage of cocoa butter than regular chocolate—a minimum of 32% and sometimes much as 50%. The additional cocoa butter means the chocolate will harden into a thin, glossy shell around dipped candy. It also helps to keep the melted chocolate nicely fluid so it's easy to work with. All types of chocolate—

bittersweet, semisweet, milk, and white—are available in *couverture*. Available at specialty stores, *couverture* can also be ordered from the companies listed below.

Albert Uster Imports, Inc., 9211 Gaither Rd., Gaithersburg, MD 20877; 800/231-8154.

La Cuisine, 323 Cameron St. Alexandria, VA 22314; 800/521-1176.

New York Cake, 56 West 22nd St., New York, NY 10010; 800/942-2539.

Paradigm Foodworks, Inc., 5775 S.W. Jean Rd. #106A, Lake Oswego, OR 97035; 800/234-0250.

Sweet Celebrations, PO Box 39426, Edina, MN 55439; 800/328-6722.



The glossy sheen and smooth texture of these tempting chocolate candies are the result of proper tempering.



Divide the nuts into groups of three before you start assembling the Macadamia Trios. The work will go more quickly and the chocolate will be less likely to set before you're finished.



Once tempered, you can use chocolate to temper almost anything. Try dipping strawberries, bananas, and other fresh fruits. Cocktail pretzels are delicious coated with chocolate, or try candied ginger with a thin coating of dark chocolate. Dip your favorite cookies, too; gingerbread and shortbread are particularly good.

Lightly grease two baking sheets or line them with kitchen parchment. In a heavy saucepan, melt the sugar until it turns a golden caramel color. Remove from the heat and quickly stir in the toasted nuts. Spread the mixture as thin as possible on the one of the prepared baking sheets. Allow the nougat to harden completely.

Meanwhile, temper the chocolate following the directions on p. 65.

Crush the hardened nougat into small pieces with a rolling pin. You should have about 1½ cups of nougat pieces. In a food processor or blender, pulverize ¼ cup of the nougat pieces to a fine powder. Fold the remaining nougat pieces into the tempered chocolate. With a teaspoon, drop small circles of the chocolate-nougat mixture onto the other prepared baking sheet. Sprinkle the top of each candy with some of the powdered nougat. Allow to harden.

Macadamia Trios

Walnut halves or peanuts and raisins can be used instead of macadamias. *Yields about 40 candies.*

1½ lb. good-quality chocolate
120 (about 12 oz.) whole roasted macadamia nuts

Line two baking sheets with kitchen parchment.

Temper the chocolate following the directions on p. 65. Fill a small plastic bag with about 8 oz. of the chocolate

and cut a small whole in one corner of the bag. Squeeze out 40 teaspoon-size drops of chocolate onto one of the baking sheets. Arrange three nuts in a triangle on top of each chocolate drop and allow to set.

Drop the nut trios, one at a time, into the tempered chocolate. With a dry fork, gently submerge the nuts until completely coated. Lift out of the chocolate, tapping gently on the edge of the bowl to shake off any excess chocolate. Set on a parchment-lined baking sheet to dry.

Chocolate-Nut Bark

Toasting brings out the flavor in nuts, but cool them completely before you add them to the chocolate or you'll destroy the temper. *Yields about 1¾ pound candy.*

1 lb. good-quality chocolate
¾ lb. toasted nuts, such as hazelnuts or almonds

Line a baking sheet with kitchen parchment. Temper the chocolate following the directions on p. 65. Fold the nuts into the tempered chocolate and spread the mixture in an even layer about ¼ inch thick on the prepared pan. Let set completely. Cut into squares with a sharp knife or break into bite size pieces.

Mark Gray has had a finger in the chocolate pot for more than 20 years. He owns Cacao Handmade Chocolates in Charleston, South Carolina. ♦