

Culture: Gourmet

Six luxury chocolates no matter the holiday

If it's Valentine's, then it's time to give chocolate, but these six luxury chocolates are perfect year-round



Tuesday, February 14, 2006

On Valentine's Day we combine celebration of romantic love and our love of chocolate.

Valentines Day started out as a Catholic feast day. So feast we do, on one of the world's most favorite flavors and a multi-billion dollar business. Although science has not been able to prove chocolate products are aphrodisiacs, that doesn't stop us from giving them to our sweethearts as part of our courting rituals.

One of the appeals of chocolate is it's melting temperature which is slightly below human body temperature giving a sensuous meaning to 'melt in your mouth'.

Chocolate causes certain endocrine glands to secrete hormones that affect your feelings and behavior by making you happy. Therefore, it counteracts depression, in turn reducing the stress of depression. Your stress-free life helps you maintain a youthful disposition, both physically and mentally. So, eat lots of chocolate, according to Elaine Sherman, in [Madame Chocolate's Book of Divine Indulgences](#).

Most people, though, have never experienced high-quality chocolate and are mostly familiar with the standard bar near the checkout at the grocery store. They're probably missing out on the high cacao product and quality beans and processing that are used in luxury chocolates. Canadian Gourmet chocolatier Bernard Callebaut said, "Europeans thought I was crazy to open a gourmet chocolate company for people whose only experience with chocolate was cheap candy bars."

The rarest and most expensive cacao bean in the world is found in Central America, the Carribean and northern part of South America and is called Criollo. The second most expensive bean is the Forastero variety which grows easily in the Amazon and in Africa.

Of the chocolate we eat, 95 percent comes from a hybrid called Forastero and a hybrid of Criollo and Forastero called Trinitario.

Not only does the type of bean make a chocolate expensive, the processing helps

determine the grade. Few chocolatiers can afford the equipment to process the bean, but those few determine the difference between the garden variety industrial chocolate most of us are happy to munch on, and the all natural smooth and complex taste of 'real' chocolate.

Fine chocolate requires two things: a good bean that undergoes extra processing and less additives. Fine chocolate contains at least 72 to 85 percent pure cocoa mass, the unsweetened content of the bean.

But prices aren't relatively expensive. Chocolate lovers can take a trip into indulgence on less than \$10 a bar.

Dark or milk?

The Chocolate Manufacturers Association, has found that taste buds are changing. Americans who prefer dark chocolate to milk has risen steadily, from 15 percent in 1991 to 27 percent in 2002. And among Americans 35 and over, the preference for dark chocolate has now risen to 37 percent.

Here are some of the best and award-winning chocolates in the world. Europeans have the edge, but fresh has an edge too. Many chocolate lovers prefer a fresh piece of chocolate made in the neighborhood more than a week-old Belgian truffle any day.



Amedei Chuao. Italian
<http://www.amedei-us.com>

Cocoa as you've never tasted it before; the flavour of a legend. Their most expensive chocolate sells for \$90 a pound. "Chuao", which takes its name from the Venezuela peninsula where the seeds are produced, has as initial flavour of plums, red fruits and an aromatic and sumptuous roundness. For the first time this natural blend is produced in its pure state. A difficult task for Cecilia Tessieri to establish the correct strength of this chocolate which even improves after a 20 day refinement period.

