

San Jorge Homemade Chocolate

Where does chocolate comes from?

Chocolate comes from the cacao tree; whose scientific name is “Theobroma Cacao”. The fruits from the tree are known as pods, which grows from the trunk of the cocoa tree, its branches and stems. These pods have to be hand-harvested, because even when ripe, they don’t fall from the tree. The average cocoa tree yields around 20 to 30 pods. The pods are filled with sweet juice and hold 20 to 40 bitter seeds. These seeds are cocoa beans, which form the main ingredient of chocolate.



Cacao, the food of the gods

The Aztecs and Mayan legends explain how at those times cacao was a divine food, and many of their secrete rituals were based on this plant. The cacao tree grew naturally in the Amazon and Orinoco tropical jungles and its cultivation started in Central America. At that time, Aztecs used cacao grains as currency for exchange, also the drink it as a juice.

In Europe, this “drink” was introduced by Hernan Cortes, and received with great enthusiasm by the Spaniards. Its bitter taste was not everyone favorite, so they start mixing this flavor with sugar and other spices. That is how the chocolate evolved until XVII century and acquire the taste and texture we all know.

Nutritional facts about cacao

130 calories are found in one ounce of serving. Of which 110 calories come from fats. There are no trans-fats or cholesterol in raw cacao beans. Raw cacao beans are rich in antioxidants, iron, an excellent source for dietary fiber, and magnesium. It has also been found that dark chocolate stimulates the release of endorphins in the human body. Which could mean that dark chocolate has an anti-depressant effect. Furthermore, a study in the “International Journal of Hypertension” reports that the antioxidants found in dark chocolate help reduce high blood pressure and improve circulation.



Facts about dark chocolate

There are few things as sweet and nutritionally healthy as a dark chocolate bar. A 100-gram chocolate bar containing 70-85% cocoa contains several benefits:

- Plenty potassium, phosphorus, zinc and selenium
- 11 grams of fiber
- 58% of the RDA for Magnesium
- 89% of the RDA for Copper
- 67% of the RDA for Iron
- 98% of the RDA for Manganese

All these nutrients come with 600 calories and moderate amounts of sugar.

Further benefits of dark chocolate may include:

- Vitamins C, A, E and D
- Lower risk for cardiovascular disease
- An improvement in blood flow and lower blood pressure
- Protect skin against sun induced damage
- Prevent risk factor in heart disease
- As well as improve cognitive functions

Where and how are Cacao trees planted?

The cacao tree can only grow in humid environments requiring warm to hot temperatures of 65° to 90° F. this exotic plant can only grow roughly within 20 degrees of the Equator. In Ecuador, commercial cacao plantations are mainly in the coastal region, in an altitudinal corridor ranging from sea level to 500 meters. The corridor features three regions: north, center and south. The north zone consists of Esmeraldas and Manabí provinces, and the range in the province of Pichincha and Cotopaxi. The soil in this northern region is mostly of volcanic origin, with an average rainfall of 2000mm per year.



The central zone comprises the northern part of the Guayas river Basin and Los Rios province, this Central area has excellent soil conditions, is fertile and deep. The annual average rainfall is 1000 mm. The southern zone corresponds to the southern part of Guayas and El Oro provinces. The rainfall for this southern region is between 500-1000 mm per year. In this southern part the weather conditions are less favorable for disease development.

Steps to produce chocolate

1. Cacao selection

Looking at cacao pods, it is necessary to be aware the pods can either turn into a green, red or purplish color once they mature. Once the mature they are ready for chocolate production, yet, if a fruit is not completely mature. The seeds flavor will be really bitter. When the pods are cut in half, the inside of this fruit contains a white jelly-like pulp that surrounds a lot of brown, small size seeds. The pulp is sweet and can be eaten. But the seeds are need in order to produce Chocolate

2. Fermentation procedure

Once the pulp and the seeds are extracted the yellow skin, it is placed in boxes with small holes in the bottom for 4-6 days. As heat accumulates under the boxes the process of fermentation starts. The natural sugars from the fruit interacts with the oxygen, causing the pulp to slowly decompose and drain. After this, seeds changes color, and their acid level reduces and start to develop chocolate taste and scent



3. Drying procedure

In this step, the seeds are spread on a surface, which is placed under the sun for a whole week. After this, the seed are selected and its residues are used for organic compost

4. Toasting procedure

Starting, the seeds are placed in a big clay griddle with a low flame. Little by little the seeds skin tone changes. In that way, the cacao seeds are properly toasted. The seeds must be constantly mix so the skin will not be burned, raw or wrongly toasted. This process can last 30-40 or more minutes, depending on the griddle's temperature and the quantity of the seeds that are added. The goal is to get the skin loose from the seeds. This happens when the seed has a uniform color. After this, the seeds are removes from the fire and with time it cools down. Then, the skin is separate from the seeds one by one. If the seed is properly toasted, the skin will come out easily.

5. Ground procedure

When all the seeds finally spread apart from the skin, the ground procedure takes place. The seeds are placed in a cocoa grinder that turns the seeds into powder (It should go through the grinder 2 to 3 times for better results

SAN JORGE HOMEMADE CHOCOLATE MEMORIES

Chocolate with empanadas de viento

Ingredients for empanadas

- 1 cup of wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon of salt.
- 1/2 teaspoon of baking powder
- 1 good spoon of butter
- 6 spoon of water

Instructions

First, mix little by little the water, the flour and the butter. Add the baking powder and the salt and mix it all.

Once is well mixed, let the mixture relax 30 minutes (soft consistence, but solid).

Roll the mixture with a rolling pin until get moderate thin.

Put the filling inside. Traditionally the inside is fresh cheese with white onion cut on tiny squares.

Make the empanada and fry it in warm oil. Check out when it gets light golden brown.

Then, eat it with hot chocolate with milk.



Hot chocolate

90% pure organic chocolate

Ingredients for chocolate

- 1 KG of cacao beans
- 100 grams of cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$ of cup of sugar
- Milk

Dark chocolate

First toast the cacao beans in a pan and take out the skin

Grind the beans until you get a consistent paste, now you get a primary 100% pure chocolate

Hot chocolate

Add milk, lemon skin and cinnamon to the paste (primary chocolate) and take it to boiling. This pure chocolate can be blend and get more consistence.

Add sugar if you like and now you are ready to eat empanadas with hot chocolate

Candies, chocolate fruits or chocolate bars with dark chocolate

Melt dark chocolate (primary chocolate) in a double boiler, adding sugar, cream, milk fruits or different ingredients of your choice

You need to calculate what percent of dark chocolate you want to get according to the amount of ingredients you will add to the original mixture.

