Tempering Chocolate



Tempering chocolate involves the process of slowly heating and then cooling chocolate so that the fat molecules crystalize evenly, resulting in a smooth, shiny finish when the chocolate sets. When tempered properly, it should produce a 'snap' when broken, while untempered chocolate will be dull and not break cleanly.

Simply put, tempering chocolate simply means melting the chocolate while controlling how its temperature rises and falls.

Tips I've learned along the way:

Only use high-quality bars of chocolate for baking (such as Ghirardelli baking bars or even Trader Joe's Pound Plus chocolate) or couverture chocolate wafers (such as Guittard or Valrhona).

When using bars of chocolate, finely chop the chocolate with a serrated knife.

Finely chopped chocolate will melt more evenly.

Chocolate chips just don't work. These have added ingredients that help them to maintain their chip shape when exposed to heat and will not melt down smoothly for tempering. Melting candy wafers is fine, but many of these chocolate compound products aren't actual chocolate because the cocoa butter has been replaced by hydrogenated industrial oils. They taste artificial and just aren't the same quality.

A good thermometer is essential to tempering chocolate because it takes the guesswork out and ensures your temper will set up beautifully.

You can use a chocolate thermometer to register the temperature stages of tempering chocolate, or simply a high-quality digital infrared thermometer. The link will steer you in the direction of one that has yet to fail me.

A double boiler is simply a heatproof bowl set over a saucepan filled with about an inch of simmering water. You want to make sure the bowl on top doesn't touch the water. The double boiler method allows the chocolate to be melted gently by the heat.

You can use metal or glass bowls for the top part of the double boiler, just remember that glass will take longer to cool down as required to temper in Step 2.

Tired of reading yet?

Here are the instructions:

- 16 oz. of finely shaved/chopped chocolate bar, preferably Ghirardelli

In a double boiler, melt 2/3 of the chocolate, stirring often, until the thermometer registers around 115°F, but no higher than 120°F. If tempering milk or white chocolate, keep the heat to 110°F. Remove the top portion of the double boiler. Important! Make sure any and all equipment that comes in contact with the chocolate remains completely dry. Any water will cause the chocolate to seize.

Gradually seed in the remaining chocolate to bring the temperature down, stirring vigorously and constantly. Stir until the temperature drops to 84°F. This can take some time, usually about 15 minutes, so just be patient – it will come down to temperature! A glass bowl will take longer to cool. Speed this process up by carefully placing the bowl of chocolate into an ice bath, making sure not to get ANY water in the chocolate.

Reheat the chocolate briefly by placing the bowl back over the bottom of the double boiler for 5 to 10 seconds at a time, stirring, until it reaches 89°F. This is the "working temperature." Do not leave the chocolate over the water or let it exceed 91°F.

You're done! Test your temper by dipping a small piece of parchment into your chocolate. Let it sit at room temperature for a few minutes. The chocolate should be smooth and firm. If it's streaky or runny, try stirring in more chocolate to the mixture to bring the temperature down further.

Tempered chocolate can be tempered over and over again. You want to keep the working temperature of about 89°F when working with it. If it goes far below that temperature, set it back over the double boiler until it is 89°F again. If it goes much above that temperature, add more seed chocolate to drop the temperature.