

# Basic Truffle-Making and Chocolate-Molding Techniques

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## Truffle-making

### Making the Ganache

You will need: Heavy cream; chocolate; flavorings as desired. If making dairy-free truffles, substitute coconut cream, nut cream, or similar. Coconut milk, rice milk, and almond milk may be used, but require reducing to remove some of the water content.

Heat one part cream on the stove until hot. Optionally, put tea or spices into the cream to steep until the flavor is infused; be sure to be generous with the flavorings at this stage, since the chocolate has yet to be added. If using tea bags or other large flavoring agents, strain them out once the cream has been thoroughly infused with flavor and reheat the cream until it just begins to simmer. Remove from the heat.

Immediately add 3-5 parts chopped chocolate or chocolate chips to the cream, stirring (and potentially reheating) until the mixture (ganache) is smooth and has the approximate texture of chocolate pudding. (White chocolate is softer than milk is softer than dark; you'll usually want a higher chocolate to cream ratio for softer chocolates.) Add liquid flavorings, such as extracts or liqueurs.

Pour the ganache into a bowl or (for dipped or rolled chocolates) greased or parchment-lined baking pan. Allow the ganache to cool, using a refrigerator if you want it to cool faster. For molded truffles, proceed to the next step as soon as the ganache reaches room temperature; for dipped or rolled chocolates, wait until the ganache is firm.

### Creating the Truffles

There are three primary ways to turn ganache into truffles: dipping, molding, and rolling. Dipped truffles require tempered chocolate (see "Tempering and Molding Chocolate") and produce a classic truffle with a hand-made look. Molded truffles require tempered chocolate and some form of deep mold, which might be a chocolate mold and might be something

as simple as an ice cube tray; they can look very professional. Rolled truffles are rolled in anything from cocoa or shaved chocolate to ground nuts or even salt; they provide opportunities for many flavor combinations, are easy to make, and can produce exotic flavor combinations, but because the ganache is not in an airtight seal will not last as long as molded or dipped truffles and are best eaten within a few days; they should be stored in an airtight container for optimal flavor and freshness.

Note that for molded truffles, you will want the ganache to still be soft enough to spoon or pour into your molds. For dipping or rolling truffles, you will need to let the ganache set, and then prepare it as described in the next section.

Combination truffles are possible; for example, you can roll a center in nuts, then dip it in chocolate.

### Preparing the Ganache

In order to dip or roll your ganache, it must be firm enough to be picked up and maintain its shape, at least for a little while. Let the ganache set in the refrigerator or freezer until it is firm to the touch.

Then, take the prepared ganache and turn it into bite-sized shapes for dipping; these will be your truffle centers. There are two primary ways to do this. If you had the ganache set in a flat container, you can use a sharp knife or even pizza cutter to cut the ganache into squares or rectangles to dip.<sup>1</sup> If you had the ganache set in a bowl, use a spoon to scoop out small sections and roll them into balls by hand. Place the balls on a cookie sheet or other clean flat surface for convenient access; do not stack them, as they will stick together. You may choose to alternate preparing a small number of centers with the rolling and dipping, to minimize space usage.

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<sup>1</sup>Yes, if you feel like being fancy and using a small cookie cutter, that will work too; but be aware that complex shapes will be more difficult to coat.

Note: if dipping the truffles, be sure to make the balls or cut sections slightly smaller than your desired final size, as the chocolate outer layer will add bulk.

### Dipping Truffles

You will need: prepared ganache centers; a large bowl of tempered chocolate; a pair of wide-toothed forks or dipping tools; a large flat surface covered in parchment paper or very flat aluminum foil.

Take a truffle center and drop it in the tempered chocolate. Use the forks to roll the center until it is completely covered, then pick it up and let the excess chocolate drain off. Place on the parchment paper to set.

You will periodically need to reheat the tempered chocolate so it remains smooth; 8-10 seconds in the microwave when it starts to thicken is usually sufficient, then stir. Scrape the excess chocolate off of your dipping forks whenever they start to clog.

### Molding Truffles

You will need: *soft* ganache; a large bowl of tempered chocolate; chocolate molds or substitutes; a non-serrated round-tipped knife or small spoon.

Use the knife or small spoon to scoop tempered chocolate into the cavities of the mold and swirl to cover all exposed surfaces. Remove excess chocolate, so that the mold has a solid shell. (If the mold is transparent, holding it up to the light to check for spots where the chocolate is too thin works well.) Let the chocolate set until firm. Note: placing the mold in the refrigerator will speed this process, but particularly in high-humidity situations may result in sticky final product. Once the mold is set, spoon in ganache, being sure to leave a thick line of chocolate around the rim of the mold. Cover the ganache with more tempered chocolate, tapping the mold to remove bubbles, and let it set.

To remove molded truffles, place the mold in the freezer for five or ten minutes, until the chocolate starts to detach from the mold. Invert the mold a couple of inches over a plate or tray and strike it gently until the truffles release. If you are having difficulty, place them back in the freezer for another few minutes.

### Rolling Truffles

You will need: prepared ganache centers; a bowl of cocoa, ground nuts, or other coating to dip them into.

Take the prepared ganache and roll it in the coating. If you are having difficulty getting the coating to adhere, roll the centers in your hands briefly to soften the outside very slightly. If the coating is being absorbed into the truffle, let the centers air-dry for a few minutes and try again.

### Troubleshooting

**The ganache is too stiff to shape** You have an overly high ratio of chocolate to cream. Use more cream in future batches; try heating this one gently to soften it a bit.

**The ganache is extremely soft and squishy** You have too little chocolate for your cream. Use more chocolate next time; if you're very ambitious, you can try reheating the batch and adding more, but you will risk having unmixed chocolate chunks in your finished product. Ganache this soft is best poured into a chocolate-lined mold, if you have one; ice cube trays will do. You can also freeze it and shape it cold, but chocolate this soft can only be dipped into melted chocolate, and (because the cold chocolate expands as it warms) the finished truffles may spring leaks. Alternately, reheat and add cream and turn it into ice cream topping.

**The ganache separates, with yellowy oil forming on top**

This is caused by there being an overly high ratio of fat to other content in your ganache, causing some of it to separate out of the mixture. It is by far the most common in white chocolate ganaches, although it can happen in milk or even dark, and usually is the result of heating your cream just long enough to remove a bit too much water. (Cheaper chocolates, with lower fat content, are actually less prone to this than high-quality chocolates.) For very mild cases, where you've already made the ganache and only notice later on that it's starting to separate, you can pour off the excess oil, or just roll it into your truffles; it's ugly and usually slightly stiffer than the chocolate mixture, but it's harmless. If it starts to separate while stirring, you can sometimes halt the process by adding sugar syrup or high-proof alcohol. I usually use 100 proof vodka, to minimize the impact on other flavors.

## Tempering Chocolate

There are many methods for tempering chocolate. The most accurate can be found in places like Harold McGee's book "On Food and Cooking"; however, these methods (like the most famous marble-slab approaches) are extremely time-consuming and require speed and precision on the part of the chef. The method described below is called "partial melt", and while it only rarely produces mirror-finish chocolate, it does produce solid, tasty chocolate 90% of the time at a tiny fraction of the effort.

Place chocolate chips or coarsely chopped chocolate in a microwave-safe glass, pyrex, or ceramic bowl. Microwave for thirty seconds, then stir for thirty seconds. Repeat alternating microwaving and stirring until about 2/3 of the chocolate is melted; then, stir without heating until smooth.

Note: the last heat may need to be less than 30 seconds; if you're not sure, use a shorter time and check. In very hot microwaves, you may need to use a lower-power setting.

If you accidentally miss the 2/3 window and you melt all of your chocolate, add additional chocolate; approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of the base mass. Stir until smooth. Pour into molds, use for dipping fruit and truffles, etc.

Note: If dipping fruit into chocolate for, e.g., chocolate covered strawberries or bananas, it is *very important* that the fruit be patted dry before dipping, as water can ruin the temper of chocolate in even tiny amounts.

## Making Flavored Chocolates

Flavoring chocolate is simple: mix in your flavorings. Coarse flavorings, such as whole nuts, work well for bark, which can then be poured over parchment paper or flat aluminum foil and broken into pieces once set. Fine flavorings, such as spices, ground nuts, or ground candy, can be mixed in and used in bars or molded pieces. Extracts and oils can be used as well.

Liqueurs, juices, and other high-water flavorings do not work well with plain tempered chocolate, as the water content can cause the chocolate to seize.

## Troubleshooting

**My chocolate has gone grainy and stiff!** This is called *seizing*, and is usually the result of water getting into the chocolate. Make sure all bowls and utensils are completely dry. If you were

adding flavorings, those flavorings may have an overly high water content. Try something else.

**My chocolate is refusing to set and is sticky.** This is usually the result of either undertempered chocolate (melted too much) or too much humidity. Try using a dehumidifier, or increasing the ratio of unmelted chocolate to melted chocolate.

**My chocolate is too thick, and doesn't pour or dip well.** It's too cold, or had too much unmelted chocolate in it. Heat in the microwave for 8-10 seconds and stir for about thirty; repeat until it's smooth and a little easier to work.

**My chocolate has streaks on it once it's cooled.** This is a harmless effect called *bloom*; fat or sugar is crystallizing out of the chocolate. This is common in the partial melt method, and results from the temper being slightly off. Sometimes, warming the chocolate more or melting slightly more of it will reduce the effect.