

TO TEMPER CHOCOLATE

Tempering is the process chocolatiers and commercial manufacturers use to make chocolate that is shiny, stays firm at room temperature, and cracks neatly when you break it. It requires melting chocolate, then cooling it to a specific temperature. This process melts crystals in the chocolate and realigns them so they behave neatly. You do not see these crystals, so the way to know tempering has succeeded is by cooling the chocolate completely and seeing if it is shiny, firm at room temperature and does not melt quickly on your fingers.

Tempering requires patience and precision. It also can be quirky. Professionals will tell you that sometimes it just does not work, though following directions carefully, it usually does. Your reward is chocolate that looks professionally made, is neat to eat, and can be stored on the counter without getting soft or looking dusty and streaky. Use tempered chocolate to make candy and to coat fresh berries, banana slices, and dried fruit.

Use only chocolate bars, slabs, or the flat disks called pistoles. Do not use chocolate chips, which contain other ingredients that prevent tempering.

It is essential to follow directions for the temperature precisely, using a candy or chocolate thermometer. To temper low-sugar dark chocolate (80-85 percent), melt the chocolate to 108 degrees F, or a little higher, then cool it to 90 degrees F. (Milk and white chocolate require different temperature goals.)

For a candy or chocolate thermometer, check your local cookware store or Amazon.com. Good digital ones include Maverick CT-03 Digital Oil & Candy Thermometer, and CDN Digital Candy Thermometer.

Ingredients

10 ounces 80-85 percent chocolate bars
3-5 packets Monk Fruit In The Raw®

Equipment

Dish Towel
Kitchen scale
Metal or heatproof glass bowl
Flexible spatula
Candy or chocolate thermometer, preferably digital (See note)

Arrange the dishtowel in a ring on a flat work surface.

Break the chocolate up into small pieces, about 1/4-inch, or chop it finely using a serrated knife.

Using a kitchen scale, divide the chocolate into 5-ounce, 4-ounce, and 1-ounce amounts, placing each in a small bowl. The 5-ounces will be melted then the 4- and 1-ounce amounts will be used to “seed” the melted chocolate as explained below.

In a deep saucepan, bring 1 inch of water to a boil. Turn off the heat. Set the heatproof bowl over the pot. Make sure it fits tightly so no steam escapes- even a wisp of moisture can make melted chocolate seize up and turn rock hard. Place the 5 ounces of chopped chocolate to the bowl and let it sit for 30 seconds. Using a flexible spatula, stir until the chocolate is melted and the thermometer, inserted into the melted chocolate registers 108 degrees F. Be sure the thermometer does not touch the bowl, which will make it register inaccurately. Melting chocolate up to 110 degrees F may not harm the process, but the more accurate you are, the more success is likely.

Set the bowl of melted chocolate on the dishtowel to hold it in place. Clip the thermometer onto the side of the bowl, making sure the probe does not touch the bowl. Using the spatula, stir the melted chocolate vigorously. Mix the Monk Fruit In The Raw™ into the melted chocolate. Add about one-fourth of the 4 ounces of chopped chocolate, stirring constantly. As the chopped “seed chocolate” melts, add more, a little at a time, to keep bringing down the temperature of the melted chocolate. Add the extra 1 ounce, if needed, and keep stirring vigorously. Reaching 90 degrees may take 20 minutes of stirring. Besides reading the thermometer, you will know the chocolate is near being in temper when the outside bottom of the bowl feels nearly room temperature.

To test whether the chocolate is tempered, coat half of a metal spoon with the chocolate. Set the spoon, bottom facing up, on a plate and refrigerate for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, keep stirring the melted chocolate. If the chocolate coating the spoon feels hard and dry, does not melt quickly from the heat of your fingers, and looks shiny, it is tempered.

Immediately use the tempered, Monk Fruit-sweetened chocolate to make Chocolate Bark (see complete recipe), pour it into molds, or start dipping fruit and truffles to coat them with the tempered chocolate.

If the chocolate cools to 90 degrees before all the chopped chocolate is added, save the extra “seed” chocolate for another use. If there are bits of unmelted chocolate in the bowl, use a slotted spoon to scoop them out, or just leave them.

If the tempered chocolate gets too thick for dipping, return it to the pot with hot water and heat for just 10-15 seconds. Remove it immediately and stir well. The chocolate must NOT heat above 91 degrees, or it will no longer be tempered.

If your chocolate does not temper, spread it on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet and cool it to room temperature, chop it up, and start the process over again, using chopped chocolate that has not previously been melted to help cool it down. Or add the untempered, chopped up chocolate to cookie dough, use it when making hot chocolate or in other recipes.