



Tasting Guide





ChocoTasting guide

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Chocolate Tasting in 7 simple steps

Step 1- Get ready

Clean your mouth, clear your mind, chose a quiet space.

For best tasting, chocolate should be at room temperature. This allows the chocolate to begin to melt the moment it hits your mouth. Cold chocolate doesn't release its flavors and aromas as quickly, altering the tasting experience.



Step 2 – Check the ingredients on the packaging

The total % of cacao (cacao mass plus cacao butter) must be high. Over 60% for dark chocolate, over 40% for milk chocolate. In order to save money some manufacturers put as much sugar, emulsifiers and vegetable oil as they can...

Avoid sugar. Sugar is damaging your pancreas until it is not any more able to work. Today one person on four become diabetic and that percentage is increasing quickly.

Avoid as much as you can emulsifiers, soy, lecithin, vegetable oil... They are used to replace cocoa butter. Cocoa butter is a good natural vegetable oil. It does not bring any cholesterol. It brings omega 3 and many other excellent components for your health.





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Step 3 - Look at the chocolate

Color, grain, greasy...

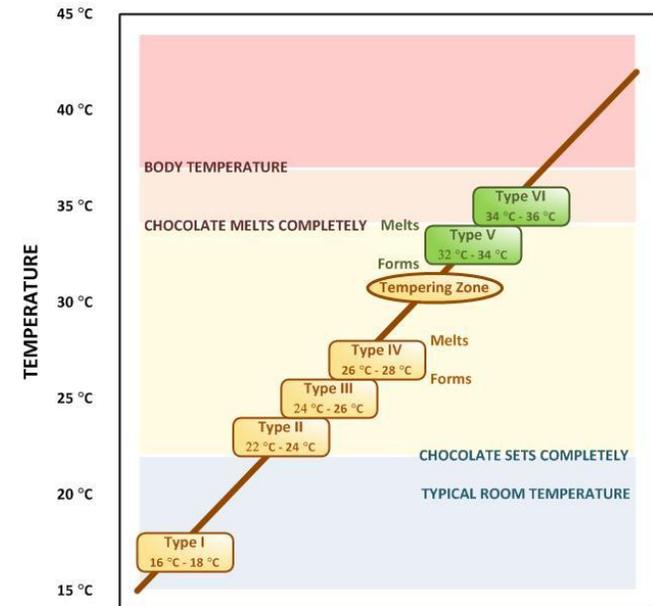
Color is not always an indication of quality. A good dark chocolate may have different colors depending if the pods / variety. Good chocolates are often redder rather than black (a sign of Criollo beans used rather than the cheaper Forastero, and of better treatment). White beans even exist. The Dutch process, where the manufacturer adds carbonates in order to increase the pH and take off part of the bitterness, makes the chocolate quite dark. But it kills many of the flavonoids, the very healthy components...

If the chocolate presents some white strains (bloomed) as if it has been plunged in some liquid and dried after... then the crystallization has been either not fully completed or deteriorated after being tempered. So the chocolate is still good for consumption, but it could have been better.

The grain should be fine, preferably without air bubbles (though these can creep in, in artisan bars.).

Look for the others colors / components too: if emulsifiers or vegetable oil, it may be greasy. Milk powder makes the chocolate clear brown. Sugar and inhomogeneous crystallization may bring a sandy look. That is why a good dark chocolate should be homogeneous and a little shiny.

Appearance: color, texture, appearance (glossy, shiny, dull, sugar bloom, fat bloom, crazing or cracks, color hue from red to black...):



Designed By Mark Cross, Elemental Chocolates 2011





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Step 4 - “Listen” to it

Break it into 2 parts and hear the “snap”. A frank click not too brittle and not too soft indicates a proper fermentation, and a good crystallization.

Step 5- Smell it

Take your finger and rub just a bit of the chocolate. The warmth of your body will cause the chocolate to melt and release odors. These odors will enhance the intensity of your tasting.

Smelling the chocolate will provide you with a first set of information, with a rough appreciation of your chocolate (does it smell “chocolaty”?) and will inform you of some of the defaults who may have occurred such as smoke when drying, mold flavours due to bad storage conditions, bad fermentation process, gas spills, chemical products, insecticides, dust collected during transportation or storage...

Chocolate flavor: rich, brown (raisins or molasses like), deep, bitter, strong, well-rounded, mild, harsh.

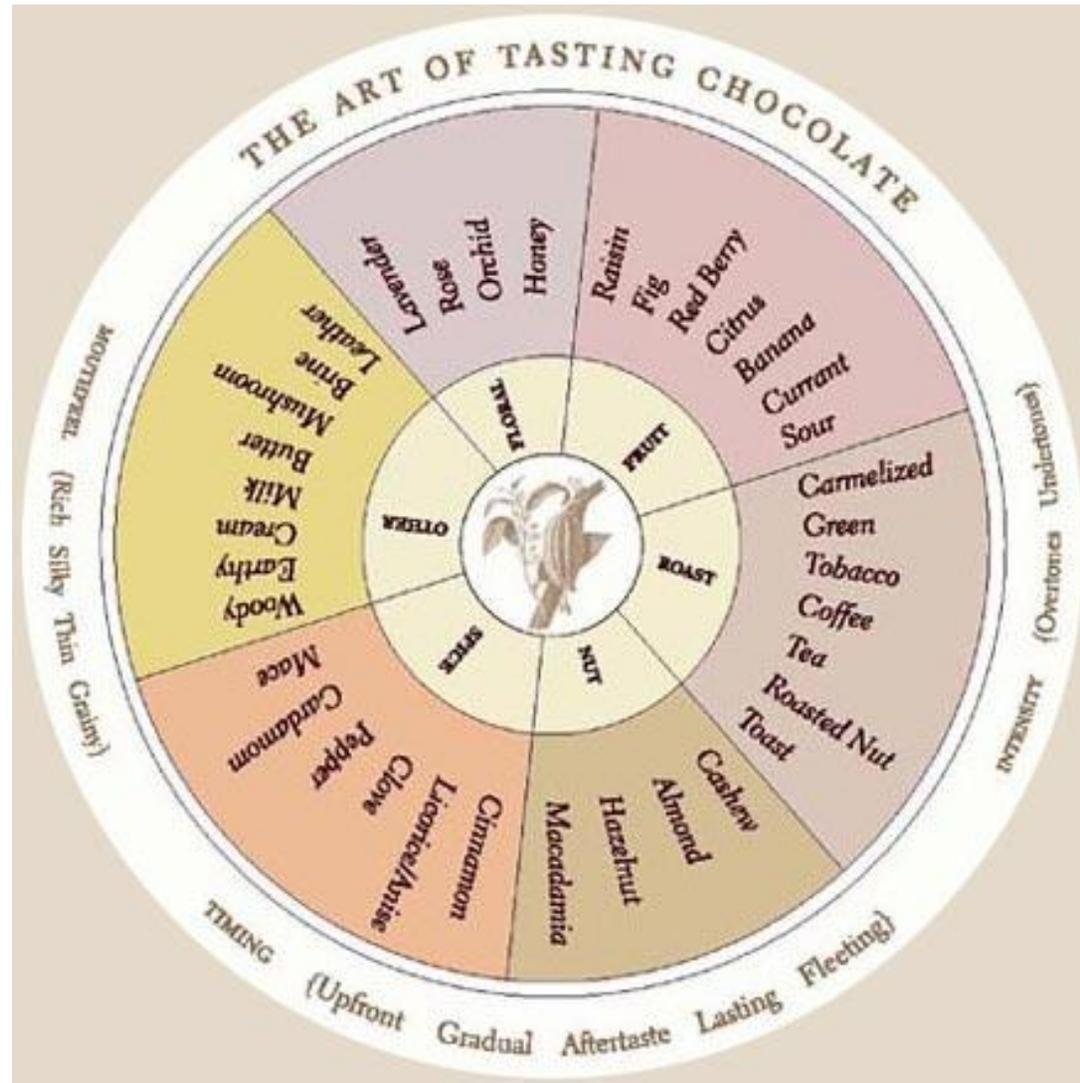
Common other aromas to be found include forest fruits, tobacco, liquorice, smoke, burnt bread, grass, citrus – and even cheese! Refer to the Tasting Wheel to identify what you smell.





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Step 6 - Taste it

Put a small piece of chocolate in the mouth and “listen” to the nerve stimulations!... in the mouth (touch, gustative and some olfactive) and in the nose (mainly olfactive). The “feeling” in the mouth may be referred as the mouth feel.

In order to better test and to benefit from the nasal’s fantastic abilities, it is useful to help all the odors / volatile components migrate from the mouth up to the nose. So all the tasting exercises such as moving the chocolate with the tongue, exchanging air between the nose and the mouth... are good to practice.

“Mouth feel: smooth, thick, gritty, powdery, lumpy, sticky, creamy, greasy, grainy, chalky, flat, coarse...

Aroma: floral, fruity, pungent, tobacco-like, coffee, spicy, herbaceous, dairy, roasted nuts, earthy, fruity (berry, citrus, plum, tart, sour cherry, winey; earthy, cut grass, herbaceous, woody; dairy, fresh milk, sweet cream, caramelized, cooked milk...

Bad flavors moldy, burned, smoked, fuel, pesticides, insecticides, ...:”



Feel free to make comparisons with any flavor you can think of; chocolate flavors are commonly described in terms of forest fruits, citrus, dark tans, tobacco, toffee, caramel, milk, coffee, almonds... the list is endless.

Bad ingredients create bad flavors – artificial vanilla, known as vanillin, is easily detected by its metallic candy-like taste. Poor quality unfermented beans will give rough, unpleasantly bitter flavors – manufacturers usually hide this with too much sugar.



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a) the attack

At the beginning, the cacao butter had not yet melted so the attack informs us about the additive, the chocolate cake and some of the defaults the beans may have encountered.

b) the body

As the chocolate melts in your mouth, it exhales. Some of the volatile molecules pass in front of your odor receptors. Chocolates always develop a set of many different flavors. Some Grand Crus are even extraordinary and the smell (the taste) last several fantastic seconds, transforming a single taste into an awesome journey.

c) the after taste

Some flavors are less volatile. They will take longer to come to your receptors. And may go on activating your receptors for quite a while. Lasting flavors, when they are pleasant, provide a fantastic sensation of eternity.

The attack, body and after taste have all their own notes, acidity, astringency, bitterness, fruity characteristics and strength of chocolate aroma. Tasting is first discovering those qualities and trying to map them. They are part of the journey!

Step 7 – The Blind test

At last, after finding out the chocolate profile (when that flavor arise, when acidity appears, how bitter is the after taste, you read your notes and try to find how you will differentiate it, what are the characteristics that make this chocolate unique. And then you control it with a blind testing. Close your eyes, it helps to concentrate. Sometime you will find that the profile you draw is not really correct. Just correct it.



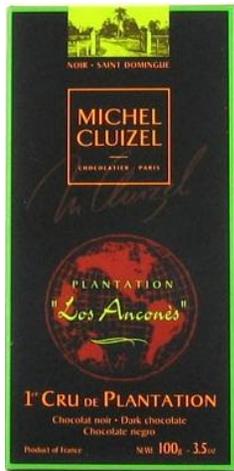
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This part is a very interesting one. It will help you to become better and better at each tasting. People will ask you: "How did you know?". What is your trick!?

Let us imagine that you have 3 chocolates: a first one, a little bitter at first then a good chocolate taste with some nuts notes at the end. The second is becoming bitter with some fruity tones. The third is astringent at first and develop some smoky tones at the end. To differentiate them, I would first check again the first one to be sure that I can recognize the nuts notes. If positive I will focus on the after taste = Smoky? Nuts? Or fruity?

If not sure, I will focus on the start (bitter or astringent?) if astringent then the third, if bitter then do I recognize the fruity tones? Yes = second, no = first



Example: Michel Cluizel Los Ancones

Look/snap: The bar from 2011 was changed to organic and away from 100g to 70g. I like this size and the thin chocolate. The chocolate is middle dark brown and looks good, the snap nice.

Aroma: The aroma starts fruity with apricot and very light sour red berries that head to licorice and green olive to come back to the fruity notes. The added vanilla does not disturb and accompanies very, very lightly the chocolate. Only at the finish can you taste a little bit the vanilla.

Taste: The taste is mild and smooth. The aroma of fruits is well accompanied of the sweetness, but also from certain bitterness. The balance of sugar and cocoa solid is very good. Melt: Also Michel Cluizel adds no lecithin, but cocoa butter to his chocolate. The melt is in this case not perfect, a little bit sticky.

Length: After tasting this chocolate you keep smiling.

Opinion: This chocolate is one of the best chocolates made from beans from Dominican Republic and from Caribbean beans. It would be great to taste this chocolate without added vanilla. I am curious to see if and how it would change the taste.