

TEMPERING CHOCOLATE AT HOME

Tempering (or crystallising) our chocolate buttons is easy as long as you remember the basic principles

- Chocolate is a crystal
- All the chocolate you use is ALREADY correctly crystallised
- Don't overheat!
- Always test before you use.

All you need to do is melt the chocolate just enough so it is a fluid but not overheated with all the crystals still intact. If you think of water, it can crystallise as sheet ice, snow or frost. Chocolate can also crystallise in 6 different ways. However, we only want the good crystals where they are tightly packed together giving a nice shine, clean snap and a little bit of shrinkage.

In the home this can be done using a microwave or a bain marie with the aid of a hairdryer.

This is what you need:

A plastic bowl (helps if it is a little bit flexible)

A spatula

A microwave or bain marie (bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water)

A hairdryer

A palette knife

Some chocolate buttons

- Put the chocolate buttons in the bowl but make sure you also keep some unmelted buttons aside.
- The amount of heat you need to apply to your chocolate buttons to melt them will depend on the amount of chocolate you are using, the power setting of the microwave and the type of chocolate. Dark chocolate has a highest melting point and white chocolate the lowest. Put the bowl in the microwave and heat on medium or full power for 15-20 seconds. (With practice and experience you will learn how long to heat the chocolate depending on how much you are trying to melt but start off slowly for now.)
- Take the chocolate out of the microwave and stir.
- Place back in the microwave for another 15-20 seconds.
- Continue heating and stirring until the chocolate is almost melted but there are still some lumps.
- Use a hairdryer to apply a gentle amount of heat to melt the last few lumps while continuing to stir.

- Test the chocolate by dipping in a knife and putting in the fridge for a few minutes. The chocolate should set within 5 and be shiny on the underneath with a clean snap.
- If it does it is ready to use!

What if I overheat the chocolate?

Should you overheat the chocolate by accident you will need to stir in some of the unmelted buttons you have set aside to bring the temperature down to the correct level. This can take some time and you need to **continue to stir**. For this reason it is better not to overheat the chocolate!

What should I do if the chocolate starts to set?

Once the chocolate is melted and starts to cool further it will start to set again in a fairly short time. This is where the hairdryer comes in. Will just a little bit of gentle heat you can keep your chocolate workable and melted for hours. Just make sure you keep an eye on it as once it starts to thicken it can set into one big block very quickly!

Can I reuse the chocolate?

The great thing about chocolate is that it can be reworked so there is no waste.

Once you have finished using the chocolate you have two options.

Option 1

While the chocolate is still melted spread thinly onto greaseproof paper placed on top of a baking sheet. Once the chocolate has set you can break it up into small pieces to use again.

Option 2

Let the remaining chocolate set in the bowl. Once it has set it will shrink and can then be knocked out in one block. To reuse this chocolate is more difficult and you will probably need to use the seeding method of tempering chocolate (see below).

The seeding method of tempering chocolate

If you have overheated your chocolate or you have a large block of chocolate that you need to remelt you will need to use the seeding method.

The best method to melt a large block of chocolate is over a bowl of simmering water (important – water must NEVER come near chocolate or it won't set EVER!). The microwave method is not suitable for melting a large block of chocolate as you will be unable to stir it to distribute the heat resulting in potential burning of some parts of the chocolate.

Once a large block of chocolate has melted over a pan of simmering water it will probably be hotter than necessary for the chocolate to correctly set.

This is when you can 'seed' the chocolate with unmelted buttons which brings the temperature down and introduces correct crystals into the chocolate. You **MUST KEEP STIRRING** during this process. If you put in too many unmelted buttons just apply gentle heat with a hairdryer to finish melting. Again, always test before use.