

How to Host a Chocolate Tasting

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You've probably been to a wine tasting. Maybe even a beer or coffee tasting. Chocolate tastings are fun at home or the workplace and you don't need to be an expert to host one. Chocolate grows in tropical regions and, like coffee, takes on flavor characteristics based on terrior and roasting. Most chocolates are blends to assure flavor consistency however, single origin or single plantation chocolates are available.

You can gather and prepare your own supplies or purchase a tasting kit, such as the single origin selection from American manufacturer E. Guittard <http://guittard-online.stores.yahoo.net/gifts-samplers.html>. Ideally, you will have chocolate from around the world of varying calibers made by different manufacturers. Lindt, Scharffenberger and Ghirardelli are commonly available. Renowned producers such as Valhrona, Callebaut, Green & Black's and El Rey are available in specialty groceries and www.chocosphere.com. Go ahead and put Hershey's in the mix for this blind tasting. Disguise the producers identifying information by scraping it from the chocolate. Five to eight solid chocolates will make a fine tasting - dark chocolate is preferred; avoid flavored or filled chocolates. You will need a tasting chart

which you can easily make or download free with instructions from the DeLoache Chocolate website, www.delochoc.com.

Many people believe the higher the percentage of cacao (pronounced kah-kow) the darker, less sweet and healthier the chocolate is. This can be deceiving. While it is true the higher the cocoa content the less added sugar there is likely to be, the percentage of cacao consists of both cocoa solids and cocoa butter. The cocoa solids provide the chocolate flavor. A 75% cacao chocolate may not have as much cocoa solid as a 55% chocolate.

Properly tempered chocolate should have a nice sheen and a crisp snap. Aroma is best discerned immediately following the snap. To evaluate mouth feel, lick your upper lip and slide the chocolate back and forth on the underside of your upper lip. This is a very sensitive part of the mouth and will prepare you for the taste to come. You may find the texture grainy, waxy, oily or silky.

Place the chocolate in your mouth and let it sit on your tongue for a few seconds. Chew twice. What are your first flavor impressions? Sweet, bitter, fruity, acidic? Now move the chocolate to

all parts of your mouth. Do the flavors linger? Have the flavors changed from your initial impression? Cleanse the palate with water. Next chocolate, please!

Have your guests write and share their thoughts on each characteristic of each chocolate. As in wine, your perceptions, likes and dislikes will differ from others. There is no established vocabulary. Chocolate tasting is an exercise in finding what you enjoy.

Using the producer's label as a reference, see what your guests believe is the country of origin, percentage of cacao, manufacturer's name and whether it is a blended chocolate or single origin. This will give your guests what they need to track down their favorites. They will be eternally grateful. Enjoy!

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DeLoache Chocolate prepares tasting kits upon request.