

Taste

Chip in a chocolate treat



Eating in

JUDITH SWEET

them artistically. Check out newsagents and art shops for interesting bags and boxes. Small noodle boxes lined with tissue make good containers.

If the day of delivery is hot, pop them in a chill bag or portable cooler to prevent them melting. Chocolates that have been in the heat develop a whitish bloom and, although okay to eat, they lose some eye appeal.

Chocolate walnut rolls

Check the walnuts for freshness before you use them. Lightly roasting the walnuts adds to the flavour. If you don't want to use a liqueur, add a teaspoon of vanilla essence. This roll can be presented as it is or coated with extra melted chocolate and decorated with toasted walnut halves and cherries.

250g dark chocolate

250g finely chopped walnuts

1 tablespoon brandy

1 egg, beaten lightly

½ cup sifted icing sugar

Chop the chocolate and melt gently. Stir in the walnuts.

Add the egg, liqueur and icing sugar and mix thoroughly together.

Shape into a roll about 2.5cm in diameter. Wrap in

foil and refrigerate.

When set, coat with extra melted chocolate. Cut into thin slices for serving.

Chocolate chestnut logs or balls

I have presented these balls in a "bag" made from marzipan paste as in the recipe below. The balls can also be served in a foil or paper case.

100g good quality marzipan, at room temperature

125g chestnut spread

125g dark cooking chocolate, melted (70g melted chocolate is sufficient to coat the log and around 200g will be needed for balls)

Knead the marzipan until smooth and soft. Work in the chestnut spread with a wooden spoon, then stir in the cooled, melted chocolate. Shape into a log around 4cm in diameter. Wrap in foil and refrigerate for several hours until set.

Melt the extra chocolate and spread evenly over the log. You may like to mark the



STARTING POINT: Use the best chocolate you can afford.

chocolate with a fork just as it starts to set. Serve in slices. If making balls, roll it into small balls and dip into melted chocolate. Place on foil or silicone paper to set at room temperature.

For a novel way to serve truffles etc, roll out a piece of fondant or marzipan to the size of a saucer. Place some balls in the centre and gather up the edges of the fondant. Tie festive coloured ribbons around the gathered top.

Marlene's mocha balls

These are a family favourite.

1½ cups sifted icing sugar

¾ cup rolled oats

2 tablespoons instant coffee

1 tablespoon coffee or chocolate liqueur

¾ cup coconut

125g butter

300g cooking chocolate for coating

Heat the liqueur and dissolve the coffee. Allow to cool. Cream together the butter and icing sugar. Add the rolled oats, coconut and coffee mixture and mix well. Roll into small ball about the diameter of a 10-cent piece. Cold, wet hands help when rolling the mixture.

Dip in melted chocolate and place on foil or silicone paper to set at room temperature.

Decorate with a chocolate-coated coffee bean.



GIFT-BOX: Use creative packaging.

CHOCOLATES are almost always a well-received gift. Of course, they don't need to be just for gifts — they make a yummy finale to any special meal.

Cooking with chocolate can be a bit tricky but, a couple of rules should help.

First, consider what you are going to use the chocolate for when you buy it.

Compound chocolates do not have the best flavour but they set firmly and therefore work well as a coating on confections. Use the best chocolate you can afford and one with a high proportion of cocoa butter. Most varieties have it listed on the wrapper.

Be careful not to overheat the chocolate when melting. If you are doing it on the stovetop, put the chocolate in a container over a saucepan of simmering water so it is able to gently melt without being in direct contact with the stove plate. If using a microwave to melt the chocolate,

choose a medium temperature and do it in short-time bursts. Remember, you can always add to the cooking time but if overdone it can't be rescued. Chocolate melted in the microwave holds its shape and it is necessary to stir it to check it has melted.

Don't get steam or condensation into the chocolate as it will become hard and lump together. If adding butter, cream or a liqueur to a mixture, heat it with the chocolate as it melts.

When dipping a confection in chocolate, a plastic fork with the centre tine removed works well. Use a small container when dipping so the warmth is retained and there will be a greater depth of chocolate to dip in.

Have fillings as cold as possible so the chocolate will set quickly as it is dipped.

Homemade confections are a gift from the heart as there is usually considerable time and effort involved in their preparation. One suggestion, simple and delicious, is to combine a mixture of cold, lightly roasted nuts through some good quality melted chocolate. Spoon the mixture into mouth-size clusters on to some silicone baking and allow to set.

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