

## **Dipped In Chocolate!**

December 16 is all about chocolate because it is Chocolate Covered Anything Day. The day provides the perfect excuse to eat chocolate, whether dark chocolate, milk chocolate, or white chocolate.

If you could cover anything in chocolate, what would it be? So many foods improve when we dip them in chocolate. It's creamy, sweet, and delicious! While we can all eat chocolate on its own, it is fun to combine chocolate with other ingredients as well!

Before covering a food, the chocolate may first be melted on the stove or in the microwave. The food can be dipped in chocolate, or chocolate can be poured or drizzled on the food.

Melt some chocolate or get yourself a chocolate fountain, and cover foods of your choice. You could even host a fondue party.

Across the world, chocoholics are going to unique lengths to fulfill their cravings by enjoying a wide range of interesting foods dipped in chocolate. Some pairings are creative, while others are unusual. Before you dismiss these concoctions, give some a try. Here are some foods you could cover with chocolate:

Breakfast foods: biscuits, bread, crepes, pancakes, waffles.

Candy: caramels, gummy candy, jelly beans, marshmallows, peanut brittle.

Desserts: bars, cake, cheesecake squares, cookies, ice cream balls, ice cream sandwiches, pie slices, popsicles, quick bread.

Fruit (fresh, frozen, or dried): apples, apricots, bananas, candied fruit peel, cherries, citrus segments, mango, melon, papaya, pineapple, raisins, raspberries, strawberries, and even watermelon.

Insects: ants, crickets, grasshoppers, and scorpions.

Snacks: crisp bacon, crackers, jerky, nuts, pretzels, pickles, popcorn, potato/sweet potato chips.

Vegetables: asparagus, edamame, broccoli, carrots, chili peppers, onions, radishes.

There are many ways you can enjoy a chocolate-dipped treat; it all depends on how you like your chocolate. Perhaps you want to cloak everything in smooth, warm, melted chocolate — in that case, chocolate fondue is for you. You can dip bread, fruit, cookies, or cake into the molten chocolate — but really, chances are whatever you submerge in quality chocolate will be delicious and a joy to eat.

Perhaps you are craving chocolate that is set but still soft for a bite that gives way with ease as with these chocolate-covered strawberries. Adding a little fat to the melted chocolate – for instance, using cream with the chocolate to make a thick ganache, or adding about a teaspoon of shortening to every half cup of melted chocolate – will give you a smoother, more manageable consistency for dipping. Bonus tip: If you add coconut oil to melted chocolate, you'll have a "magic shell" for your ice cream.

If you want chocolate that is smooth, glossy, and hardens when you leave it to dry, you'll need to temper it. You can tell that chocolate is tempered if you hear a sharp, clean crack when you break a piece of it. If truffles are on your holiday baking to-do list, tempering is essential.

Tempering chocolate can be intimidating, especially since the chocolate must hit certain precise temperatures in order for it to work properly. You must first heat and melt your chocolate to 115°F, then rapidly lower the temperature to 81°F while vigorously stirring it. Then the chocolate is reheated again until it reaches a range of 88 to 90°F before you can work with it.

December 16 is the perfect time to satisfy your craving for chocolate-covered anything while getting into the holiday spirit. If you haven't tried topping your favorite items with molten chocolate, then it's time for you to do it. Cover your food in chocolate today, and, in the spirit of the holiday season, share some of your chocolate-covered treats with your friends and family. Enjoy!