Homemade Candy Success

Who doesn't love a delicious sweet piece of candy? Whether making a treat for parties, gift giving, or because it is a holiday, candy-making is easy if you know the tricks of the trade.

Check The Weather

Weather can significantly impact candy. When making candy, it is important to try to pick a day that is dry and not humid. On humid or rainy days, candy may refuse to set.

Candy Thermometer

A candy thermometer is used to test the temperature when cooking candy, jams, and jellies. Digital thermometers are preferred for their accuracy. Most have an adjustable clip so you can rest the thermometer against the side of the saucepan. It is essential to ensure the thermometer is not touching the bottom of the pan, or the thermometer will give you a false reading.

Candy thermometers are not the same as regular thermometers. They have words like soft ball and hard crack on them, and they are usually glass. To calculate a final candy temperature, you should first bring a pan of water to a rapid boil. Read the thermometer to find the boiling point of water at your altitude. Make sure the bulb does not slip out of the water or touch the edges or bottom of the pan. Subtract the boiling point of water at your altitude from the boiling point of water at sea level (212°F). Next, subtract that number from the candy temperature needed for your recipe to get the final temperature at your altitude. For example, if the boiling water at your altitude is 198°F, subtract 198 from 212 (boiling point of water at sea level) to find the temperature adjustment. Subtract this number (14) from the finish temperature in the recipe.

Type of Pan

When making candy, it is important to use a heavy saucepan, so your candy does not burn or scorch. To save from cleaning up a big mess, also use a large, deep saucepan to prevent the candy from boiling over.

Ingredients

Use white cane sugar. Avoid beet sugar since it doesn't work as well for candy making. If your recipe calls for butter, don't substitute margarine. Butter comes in salted and unsalted varieties. Unless your recipe calls for a specific one, either will work. Margarine and butter spreads may not be a good substitute because they do not create the right texture needed for candy. Butter also gives candy that rich, creamy taste we associate with it.

Controlling sugar crystallization is one of the most important aspects of candy making success. Dissolve sugar into liquid ingredients over low heat, and then bring to a boil. Do not stir once the sugar has dissolved unless directed to by the recipe. Cook until the desired temperature is reached. Immediately remove the pan from the heat and cool the bottom of the pan in a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking unless the recipe says otherwise.

Candy Testing

When making candy, you can use a couple of tests to ensure you have cooked your candy long enough. It's best to use a candy thermometer, but if you don't have one you can do the cold water test. The cold water test works well at all altitudes. Your recipe may advise cooking until ½ teaspoon of the syrup dropped into cold water forms a soft, firm, or hard ball when removed. If the syrup separates into hard but not brittle threads when dropped in the cold water, it has reached the "soft crack" stage. If these threads are brittle and hard, it has reached the "hard crack" stage.

Storage

Store homemade candies in tightly covered containers unless otherwise directed. Always store different types of candy in separate containers, using waxed paper between layers. Most homemade candy will keep for about 2 to 3 weeks. When freezing candy, you will want it to thaw at room temperature for 1 to 2 hours before serving.

Candy making is a family tradition and a holiday tradition. If you have not made candy before, start a new tradition at your house this year!

Sources (https://www.uaex.uada.edu; https://www.wyoextension.org)