

## Savory Side Of Chocolate

When you think of chocolate, I bet you usually think of dessert. Traditionally, cooking with chocolate means desserts and conjures up images of brownies, chocolate cake, chocolate chip cookies, or some other type of dessert.

If you think that chocolate is only for after dinner – think again! Chocolate is more than just a sweet treat or ingredient in desserts. Chocolate has become a key ingredient for bringing out flavors in savory dishes. When used sparingly, chocolate adds complexity and a velvety texture to savory recipes. Here is some basic info about using chocolate for savory applications.

All chocolate starts with cacao. Cacao beans are dried, fermented, and roasted; then, the nibs are extracted from the beans, ground, and liquefied into chocolate liquor, a mixture of cocoa solids and cocoa butter. Liquor does not mean that it contains alcohol but means “liquid.”

Chocolate comes in many forms: unsweetened, bittersweet, semi-sweet, milk chocolate, and white chocolate (technically not chocolate). Cocoa powder is made by separating the cocoa butter from the liquor.

- Unsweetened chocolate is pure chocolate liquor and about 50% cocoa butter. No sugar has been added to the chocolate.
- Bittersweet chocolate blends at least 35% liquor with as much as 50% cocoa butter, sugar, and vanilla.
- Semi-sweet chocolate has to contain between 15 and 35% chocolate liquor. It is slightly sweetened during processing.
- Milk chocolate contains about 10% chocolate liquor with about 12% milk solids.
- White chocolate is made from milk solids, cocoa butter, sugar, and vanilla. It contains no cocoa solids, so it is not strictly chocolate.
- Cocoa powder is essentially cocoa solids in powdered form. It has an intense, bitter flavor.

The flavor and percentage of chocolate liquor are critical when choosing a chocolate. They impact the flavor and texture of a dish.

Chocolate is highly versatile in cooking. Let's explore how different chocolates can enhance various savory recipes:

**White Chocolate:** Known for its creamy and sweet profile, it pairs amazingly with seafood. The contrast between the salty seafood and the sweetness of white chocolate creates a harmonious balance that is truly remarkable.

**Dark Chocolate:** The slightly bitter and rich notes of dark chocolate make it a classic choice for savory recipes. When used judiciously, dark chocolate's rich and slightly bitter notes can elevate meat dishes like beef, lamb, or wild game meats to gourmet levels. Dark chocolate's depth of

flavor enhances the complexity of stews and sauces, resulting in a velvety texture and subtle tartness.

Cocoa Powder: Adding a touch of cocoa powder to batters, crusts, or barbeque rubs infuses a chocolate essence. It makes your dishes unforgettable.

The key to successfully utilizing chocolate in savory dishes is balance. Chocolate should never overpower the other ingredients but rather enhance and elevate them. Chocolate is a supporting ingredient that adds depth and complexity to all the dish's flavors. So, use a light hand with chocolate in savory dishes. Blend just enough chocolate to balance the other ingredients. In addition, if you taste chocolate or the dish is bitter, you've added too much. Temper it with sweet and salty flavors.

Expand your cooking horizons by adding chocolate to your favorite dishes. Meals emphasizing chocolate throughout every course are especially popular for romantic Valentine's Day dinners. Happy cooking, and may your dishes be filled with the delightful pleasure of chocolate!