

The delicate etiquette of chocolate

Chocolate makes the world go round.

Well, OK, it's only the third largest item traded behind coffee and sugar. But "the world stops when you have dark chocolate," says Professor Jordan LeBel, who wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the sweet subject, and was in Vancouver to promote Poulain premium dark chocolate bars.

Ever wonder why you can eat milk chocolate by the bar (or barrel), but a few squares of dark (which has a higher concentration of cocoa) is satisfying? The added salt and sugar is why you can't stop, says LeBel. "That doesn't happen with dark chocolate."

What's more, dark chocolate – not milk or white – is good for you. A percentage of 64

cocoa content and up contains antioxidants, says LeBel. They're credited with reducing bad cholesterol, lowering blood pressure, and having anti-aging properties. And chocolate produces serotonin, which relaxes you and relieves stress.

But you can have too much of a good thing. Preferred cocoa content is 75 to 85 per cent, says LeBel. "Fat is a flavour carrier, you want some of it to allow flavours to expand."

The next time you have a dinner party put out a few bars of dark chocolate (with the below pairings) as dessert, suggest LeBel. "Friends are going to raise an eyebrow at first," he says, but eventually their tongues will be wagging.

—Carly Krug, 24 hours



—Rafal Gerszak, 24 hours

Chocolate may seem a simple pleasure, but there's more to tasting it than meets the, um, tongue.

THE FINE ART OF TASTING

See: Just as you'd swirl wine in a glass, dark chocolate appreciation starts with observation. Black-brown colour indicates cocoa content. It should be slightly glossy.

Smell: The origin of the cocoa beans and roasting and fermenting process all effect the scent. Appreciate aromas of vanilla, nuts or dried fruits.

Snap: Dark chocolate should break cleanly, creating two crisp edges, with a dry little noise called the "craquant."

Savour: Best between 19 C and 25 C. Let the chocolate rest on your tongue to allow flavours to come alive. Chew each bite five to 10 times to reveal complexity. Swallow. Breathe in through mouth, then exhale through nose to reveal unnoticed flavours.

PAIRING PARTNERS

Dried fruit: "Chocolate doesn't like fresh fruit because of the acidity," says LeBel, but the fructose in dried fruit (cherries, cranberries, apricots) mixes well with cocoa's tartness.

Stout: The beer's barley and malts provide a roasted and toasted flavour, similar to that of coffee, that pairs well with dark chocolate.

Fresh herbs: Fans of mint chocolate bars will love dark chocolate topped with a sprig of fresh mint. Basil is another interesting combination, but can be an acquired taste.

ADJECTIVES TO IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS:

Taste/After-taste: Flowery, fruity, nutty, spicy, herbal, caramel-like.

Texture: Buttery, velvety, smooth.

Intensity: Mild, intense, concentrated.

Bitterness: Austere, drying, bitter-sweet, sweet, honey-sweet.

Persistence: Fleeting, light, lasting, penetrating.