

WHAT IS PESACH WITHOUT CHOCOLATE?

Chocolate can be found in a dizzying array of forms and flavors today. Many desserts, especially for Pesach, include chocolate chip treats, chocolate cake, chocolate ice cream, and who can forget the classic chocolate macaroon? We drink hot chocolate, chocolate liquor and chocolate milk and add chocolate syrup to drinks and desserts. But how does all this chocolate come to our tables, and what kinds of chocolate need to be certified as kosher or kosher for Pesach?

FROM FIELD TO TABLE

FROM PLANT TO FACTORY

Pure chocolate comes from the fruit of cacao trees, which are native to South and Central America. Ancient cultures used the pure, bitter cacao beans and cacao pods in ceremonial drinks and even as currency. These beans were first brought to Spain, possibly by Christopher Columbus, and over time chocolate was exported, sweetened, processed, and adapted into to what we now recognize as sweet and bittersweet chocolate.

Nowadays cocoa beans arrive primarily from warm climate countries in Africa. There, they are harvested, fermented, and dried in the hot sun. This process does not present any *kashrus* concerns. As a result, pure cocoa beans do not need certification during the year or for Pesach.

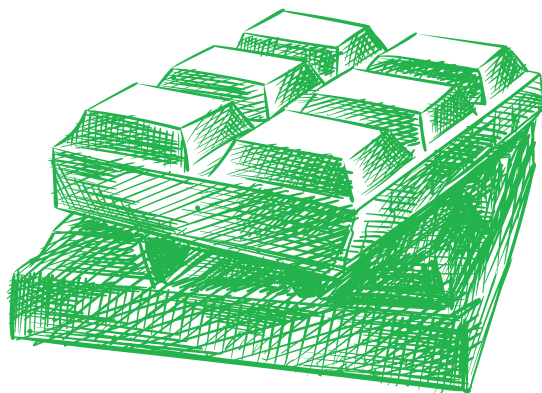
FROM BEAN TO COCOA

A few large companies change the beans into chocolate. First, they roast the beans with high heat, to crack the shell and remove the nibs from the shell, which also impacts the ultimate flavor of the chocolate. Next the nibs are ground by



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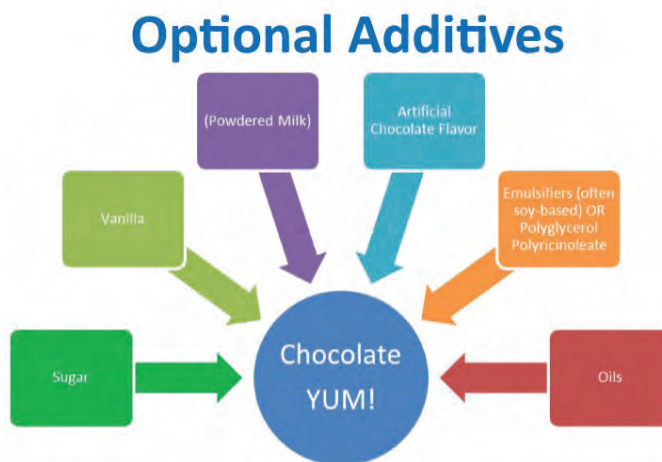
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rollers until they become a high fat content mass, known as cocoa liquor (not to be confused with chocolate liqueur – see below), which has two components – the solids, which become cocoa powder, and the liquid cocoa butter. Pure cocoa powder and pure cacao nibs do not need certification during the year or for Pesach.

FROM COCOA TO CHOCOLATE

There are three distinct categories of chocolate: dark chocolate, milk chocolate, and white chocolate, each of which goes through a distinct process which includes adding various ingredients. For the final chocolate product to be kosher or kosher for Pesach, these ingredients and the process must be certified, as highlighted below.



KOSHER CONCERNS

EQUIPMENT

Most chocolate factories share the same pipes for dark and milk chocolate, and those pipes are never cleaned. This is because any water in the equipment could have an adverse effect on the final product. In fact, because of this shared equipment, an FDA study found milk in 61% of dark chocolate bars tested, even if they did not list milk as an ingredient. This is why companies print an allergen alert stating that the chocolate is made on equipment shared with dairy ingredients. At times there may be such a high content of dairy in dark chocolate that it will not be *batel* (nullified) and cannot be considered *pareve*. Consequently, only companies that have exclusive production lines for dark chocolate may be permitted to produce kosher *pareve* chocolate.

Furthermore, because chocolate has to be kept warm to prevent it from becoming solid (chocolate becomes solid at a temperature between 90°F and 100°F), the pipes are heated. If the steam is recirculated and shared between the dark and milk chocolate lines, this could also create a problem with any attempt to make *pareve* chocolate.

SENSITIVE INGREDIENTS

One of the first things many chocolatiers do with the pure cocoa liquor mass, which itself would not need kosher or kosher for Pesach certification, is to remove some of the cocoa butter from it. They replace that cocoa butter with other oils, which need to be kosher-certified, and, seasonally, certified as kosher for Pesach. The cocoa butter which they remove is added to the better quality and higher-end chocolate to make it smoother and richer. It can also be used as a component in various lotions (which would not pose a concern for Pesach). The chocolate in which the cocoa butter is replaced with the other oils is the cheaper chocolate, known as compound chocolate.

Various ingredients are added during chocolate production, many of which would need to be kosher or kosher for Pesach-certified. The first addition is sugar, to temper the extreme bitterness of pure chocolate, and which, in its pure



Cacao Pods

HARVESTING



Wet Cacao Seeds

FERMENTING & DRYING



Dried Cacao Seeds

CLEANING & ROASTING



Roasted Nibs

GRINDING



Cocoa Mass aka "Liquor"



Cocoa Powder



Cocoa Butter

state, does not pose *kashrus* concerns during the year or for Pesach. Most chocolates also have vanilla added to the mixture for sweetness, and while white chocolate does not contain any cocoa powder, it does have powdered milk. Some companies also add artificial chocolate flavor to compensate for the poor-quality beans, and emulsifiers, which are often soy-based (*kitnios*) lecithins, are used to ensure that the oil spreads evenly. In recent years polyglycerol polyricinoleate is also used, which helps give chocolate a smoother feel. All of these additives need to be certified kosher.

Once the desired chocolate is finally obtained, it is cooled and molded. Chocolatiers may also create chocolates with fillings or as enrobed products. And chocolate may be used to flavor liqueur and other drinks, as well. Obviously, these additional ingredients and products have a host of other *kashrus* issues which are beyond the scope of this article.

So, as you can see, as with many other products, the process of turning the fruit of the cocoa tree into the delectable dessert we know so well is complex. The good news is that with all the necessary kosher supervision, a wide variety of kosher and kosher for Pesach chocolate confections are available around the world. So, whether you like chocolate macarons, truffles, bars, lollipops, seven-layer cake, or any other delicious confection, we wish you a sweet and kosher Pesach! ▲

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