

Chocolate Mousse

Serves 8 to 12 (depending on the size of the container)

Ingredients

- 18 ounces good quality semi-sweet chocolate,* chopped
- 4 cups 35% whipping cream
- 1 saucepan filled with one inch of barely simmering water
- large wire whisk
- 1 dozen sherry or shot glasses

** I use Bernard Callebaut semi-sweet chocolate — 66% cocoa.*

Special Equipment

- parchment paper
- piping bag with plain tip, optional

Cooking Instructions

If you want the mousse to rise above the containers, as pictured, first make a collar by wrapping a piece of parchment or waxed paper around each container, leaving about 1" excess above the container. Secure the paper with tape or kitchen twine. Prepare your containers prior to making the mousse.

The key to this mousse is the temperature of the chocolate. It should be completely melted but not too hot. The ideal temperature is 50 degrees Celsius, which is warm, not hot, to the touch. If you have a kitchen thermometer handy, use it.

In a metal bowl that fits over the saucepan of barely simmering water, ensuring that the bowl does not touch the hot water, add the chopped chocolate and 1 cup of whipping cream. Gently melt the chocolate, stirring occasionally, until the chocolate is fully melted, but not overly hot.

In the bowl of a stand-up mixer fitted with a wire whisk, add the remaining 3 cups of whipping cream. Whisk the cream until it is thickened only. The cream should not be firm enough to hold its shape. When you remove the whisk from the bowl, the cream should drip off in thick beads.

With a whisk close at hand, pour the warm melted chocolate, all at once into the barely whipped cream. Combine with a whisk until the chocolate mousse is uniform in colour. The texture will firm as you combine the chocolate with the cream.

The mixture is now ready to pour into your containers.

If you have a piping bag, pour the mixture into a piping bag; this will help get the mousse into the glasses neatly, without any mess. Managing a piping bag is easy when you use a narrow canister or large-mouthed glass to hold the piping bag in place while you fill it. Simply tuck the narrow end of the bag into the container (tip side down) and roll the large end of the bag over the edge of the container, like a cuff, to hold it in place.

Pipe or spoon the mixture into the glasses and refrigerate until set.

Pear Chips

Ingredients

- 1 firm pear, washed
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup water
- lemon zest (white pith removed) from ½ lemon
- a mandoline or single-blade slicer
- parchment-lined baking tray.

Cooking Instructions

Preheat oven to 200°F.

Combine the sugar, water and lemon zest in a small saucepan and heat the mixture until the sugar is completely dissolved.

Slice the pear into paper-thin slices using a mandoline or single-blade slicer/grater.

Using a pastry brush, coat both sides of each pear slice with the sugar-water solution. Place the coated slices on the parchment-lined tray, being careful not to overlap the slices.

Dry in the oven for 2 to 3 hours. To test the chips, remove the tray from the oven and allow the pears to cool for 10 minutes (away from a humid kitchen). If your kitchen is warm, place the tray of pears outside to cool them. Gently peel the pears from the parchment. If they are firm and crisp, they are ready. If not, continue to dry them in the oven for another half hour and test again.

The pear chips can be made a few days ahead of time and kept in a covered container.

Chocolate Leaves

Ingredients

- 6 ounces good quality chocolate, chopped into small pieces
- Small, firm leaves, washed and completely dried
- a parchment-lined tray

Cooking Instructions

Melt the chocolate in a metal bowl placed over a saucepan filled with one inch of simmering water. The bowl should not touch the water. When the chocolate has just melted, dip the cleaned leaves into the chocolate and place on a parchment-lined tray. Try to coat only one side of each leaf with chocolate as this will make it easier to remove. Place the leaves in the refrigerator to firm the chocolate.

Once the chocolate has firmed, carefully peel back the leaf from the chocolate.

To serve the mousse, remove from the refrigerator approximately 20 minutes before serving. Remove the parchment collar and garnish with the pear chip and chocolate leaf just before serving.