

*This Season's best to you and yours
and wishes for your Happiest New Year ever!!*

How to Make the Best Chocolate Bark



What can I say? Chocolate bark is fun to make and I LOVE coming up with wild flavor combinations.

Where my exacting nature comes into play is in my tempering the chocolate to ensure that the bark has a smooth, glossy sheen and crisp snap and that it will store well for a while without becoming dull and fuzzy-looking.

A little background: Most high-quality chocolate starts out tempered, meaning it's been stabilized through a melting-and-cooling process. Once chocolate is heated to above 94°F, as it must be to be melted, it loses its temper. While tempered chocolate isn't usually necessary for baking, it is for most chocolate-covered confections and bonbons. And bark benefits from it, too. Without tempering, the cocoa butter in the chocolate can form unstable crystals that give the chocolate a dull appearance with gray streaks called fat bloom. Untempered chocolate can also have a grainy texture.

The method I use, sometimes referred to as “block seeding” and shown below, is simple, requires no specialized tools, and is tidy. Read on for more about making delicious bark to give away; just be sure to keep a little for yourself.

An easy tempering technique and colorful toppings bursting with flavor make these treats perfect for gift-giving.

Bark like a pro: 10 tips for making gift-worthy bark

- **Start with excellent chocolate**, preferably made with beans from South America or Madagascar. For dark chocolate, choose 60% to 75% cacao.
- **Be sure no stray water gets into the melting chocolate**, or it will seize and become grainy.
- Make sure to **spread the melted chocolate thinly**. Thin bark breaks into attractive shards and is easy to eat.
- **For toppings, consider color and texture as well as flavor**. A little crunch, whether from a nut or whole spice, is nice. Try chopped Pistachios, Chopped Mint candies, Hazelnuts, Heath bars, Cranberries or Dried Cherries, Chopped Pretzels etc. Have FUN and make your OWN signature bark. **NOTE:** This would be fun to do with friends or family as a holiday activity.
- **Work quickly to add toppings** before the chocolate begins to set.
- **Scatter toppings with abandon**—the more organic looking, the better.
- **Store the bark in a cool (between 60°F and 65°F) room as it sets**. The temperature encourages the edges to retreat and curl, which looks really pretty.
- **Once the topping is on, leave the bark alone for at least 12 hours**. If you fiddle with it too soon, you may leave fingerprints or scratches on the chocolate.
- **Don't refrigerate chocolate bark**. Condensation will occur when you take it out. When the water evaporates, dissolved sugar remains on the surface of the chocolate, leaving an unpleasant residue known as sugar bloom.
- Use cellophane or food-grade tissue to package bark for gift-giving. A mix of a few flavors is especially nice.

Instructions and recipes to follow....





SAMPLE Recipes:

Chocolate Bark with Dried Mango, Coconut, and Chile



Tropical flavors brighten up this bark; and a little heat keeps things interesting:

- 3 lb. dark chocolate in block or bar form
- 1 cup finely diced dried mango
- 1/2 cup toasted unsweetened coconut flakes
- 1 tsp. ancho chile powder

NOTE: If your chocolate does not come in large blocks, use the biggest pieces you can, such as two 4-oz. bars in place of the 1/2-lb. chunk. The large size makes it easy to retrieve the unmelted chocolate once the melted chocolate is in temper. (I usually find mine at WholeFoods)

Line two large rimmed baking sheets with parchment, and tape the parchment to the baking sheets. Put a piece of parchment on the counter, too. Have ready an instant-read thermometer. Have your toppings ready, too.

Melt and temper the chocolate: Finely chop 2 lb. of the chocolate and put it in a heatproof bowl that fits snugly over a 4-quart saucepan. Cut the other 1 lb. of chocolate into two pieces.

Fill the saucepan with about 2 inches of water (it should not touch the bowl). Bring the water to a boil, remove the pot from the heat, and put the bowl of chocolate over it. Gently stir the chocolate occasionally with a silicone spatula until it is fully melted and reaches between 115°F and 120°F on an instant-read thermometer, 10 to 12 minutes.

Remove the bowl from the pot, wipe the bottom dry, and add one of the 1/2 lb. blocks of chocolate to the bowl. Constantly fold the solid chocolate with the melted chocolate; the solid chocolate will melt somewhat but not fully. Take the temperature of the chocolate now and then.

When it drops to 95°F, after 4 to 5 minutes, take what's left of the solid chocolate out of the bowl. Add the second block of chocolate and fold constantly.

When the temperature drops to 90°F, take the block out. (The chocolate blocks can be reused for other recipes.) Gently stir the melted chocolate for 1 minute more. Spread the chocolate, top, and cool

Divide the melted chocolate between the prepared baking sheets, and working quickly, spread it to about 1/4-inch-thick with an offset spatula. Immediately sprinkle the mango and coconut flakes over both sheets of warm chocolate, pressing down lightly, and then sprinkle each sheet with the chili powder.

Place in a cool (60°F to 65°F) room or refrigerate it for just 5 minutes to set. For best results, let the bark sit for 12 hours before breaking it into shards.

Hazelnut-Cranberry Chocolate Bark



- 1 cup coarsely chopped toasted hazelnuts
- 2 Tbs. ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. fine sea salt
- 3 lb. milk chocolate in block or bar form
- 3/4 cup chopped dried cranberries

Line two large rimmed baking sheets with parchment, and tape the parchment to the baking sheets. Put a piece of parchment on the counter, too. Have ready an instant-read thermometer. Mix the nuts, cinnamon, and salt in a small bowl. Transfer to a fine-mesh strainer and sift out the excess cinnamon and salt; reserve for another use.

Melt and temper the chocolate: Finely chop 2 lb. of the chocolate and put it in a heatproof bowl that fits snugly over a 4-quart saucepan. Cut the other 1 lb. of chocolate into two pieces. Fill the saucepan with about 2 inches of water (it should not touch the bowl).

Bring the water to a boil, remove the pot from the heat, and put the bowl of chocolate over it. Gently stir the chocolate occasionally with a silicone spatula until it is fully melted and reaches between 115°F and 120°F on an instant-read thermometer, 10 to 12 minutes.

Remove the bowl from the pot, wipe the bottom dry, and add one of the 1/2 lb. blocks of chocolate to the bowl. Constantly fold the solid chocolate with the melted chocolate; the solid chocolate will melt somewhat but not fully. Take the temperature of the chocolate now and then. When it drops to 95°F, after 4 to 5 minutes, take what's left of the solid chocolate out of the bowl.

Add the second block of chocolate and fold constantly. When the temperature drops to 89°F, take the block out. (The chocolate blocks can be reused for other recipes.) Gently stir the melted chocolate for 1 minute more.

Spread the chocolate, top, and cool

Divide the melted chocolate between the prepared baking sheets, and working quickly, spread it to about 1/4-inch-thick with an offset spatula.

Immediately sprinkle the nuts and cranberries over both sheets of warm chocolate, pressing down lightly.

Place in a cool (60°F to 65°F) room or refrigerate it for just 5 minutes to set. For best results, let the bark sit for 12 hours before breaking it into shards.