



Gourmet Caramel Apples

This wonderful time of year when the humidity drops and the temps drop to
"WHY WE LIVE HERE"...

The Palm Beach Green Market starts up. Last weekend they had Gourmet Caramel Apples for sale and while I did not succumb then...(as they were asking \$15.00 a pop) Neither, have I been able to release them from my mind!!!

So for Halloween and just whenever...
Here is MY take on the Gourmet Caramel Apples thing:



First, the apples. I left the fork in the picture for scale. As you can see these are not the huge apples you find at the fairground, but more moderately sized. Go larger or smaller to your taste. I like Granny Smiths, Honeycrisps and Gala, but use whichever apples you like best so long as they are firm and crisp.



The apples need to be well washed, to remove any of the food grade waxes, buildup, etc. I added 2 tablespoons of vinegar to the water to help wash away impurities.
Rinse and dry, dry, dry well.

OK on to the caramel. I like to use ONLY Merckens Caramel
(which comes in a Block - 5 lb. \$29.95 see link below)

<http://www.confectioneryhouse.com/merckens-vanilla-caramel-block-5-lb>

It is my absolute FAV in taste hands down. For starters, it comes in a nice big block so there are no annoying little plastic wrappers floating about the kitchen. The block can be stored at room temperature for months and it retains it's soft texture. You can whack off a big chunk for baking, or a small piece for nibbling whenever the mood strikes. To melt the caramel, you can use a [double boiler](#), the microwave, or my personal favorite: **The Slow Cooker.** To do it that way: Melt on high for about 2 to 3 hours, or low for 4 to 5 hours, depending on your unit. This also keeps the caramel perfect for dipping for a long time.

For this recipe, I melted the Merckens caramel straight from the package. No cream or milk was added to thin it down. Just be sure to get the caramel good and hot so that it's thin enough to dip easily.



The best sticks I've come across are wooden chopsticks. You might be able to get a few pairs for free if you order out enough, but I found a huge bag at our local party store for \$3.99.



NOTE: If you aren't into the floral look, (I WAS"NT) the papers on these sticks do slide off. It is baker's choice here.



I really like silicone tools when working with caramel and other sticky ingredients. Just let it cool a bit and ... Peel it right off.



The caramel can go straight back into the pot to melt again. No fuss, no muss, no waste. Lining your work surface with parchment is a huge help as well.



Once the caramel was hot, all the apples, sticks, and caramel went onto a cart, and I was ready to go....

I just pushed the stick firmly into the core of the apple. You do not even need to remove the stem of the apple...though I did. Once the stick is inserted, place the apple on a flat surface to finish pushing the stick into the center of the apple.



When melting the caramel, you want to stir slowly and evenly. If you stir too quickly and dip your apple, you can get bubbles in the caramel like the apple on the left. You want a smooth, shiny surface like the apple on the right. Of course, once the chocolate is applied, no one will see the bubbles too much, so don't stress too much here.



If you're going to skip the chocolate, have your sprinkles and toppings ready to go as soon as you dip the apples. **NOTE:** The caramel firms up quickly and you want your toppings to adhere well, like this crystallized sugar.



Once all your apples are coated in caramel, set them aside to firm up while you tidy up and get the chocolate melting.

For these apples, I used **coating chocolates** from

<http://www.bulkfoods.com/Drops.asp>

that were just perfect. They come in convenient wafers, melt quickly and smoothly and taste delicious.



I have found that to melt several different chocolates at the same time, place them in heat-safe bowls on a baking sheet and place in a 200° oven for 10 to 15 minutes. Stir until melted and lump-free.

For toppings, it's fun to have a variety available. Some folks prefer the simple chocolate-on-chocolate route, while others like a splash of color.

Once again, have all your toppings ready to go when the chocolate is ready. You will have a little more time as the chocolate sets up more slowly.



You can pour the chocolate into tall, deep containers and dunk, but I liked using spoons for drizzling. If you're using two different kinds of chocolate, let the first layer set up a bit before adding the next layer. **NOTE:** I also learned to hold the wet, drippy apple over a neutral bowl to avoid mixing our chocolates.



Ohhh YUMMO, white chocolate with milk chocolate stripes over vanilla caramel.
HEAVEN!!!



NOTE: Be sure to sprinkle on your toppings while the chocolate is still wet. Use your fingers for sprinkling on a light coating, or a spoon for heavy coverage.



Soooo How do ya like these apples?

They were some that the charter guest's kids helped to make using this recipe.

NOTE: I set the apples on parchment to finish firming up at room temperature.

NOTE: For cleaning up the leftovers, just spoon all the leftover caramel and chocolates onto a bowl. Warm to soft and then pour on to parchment lined sheet pan, add any leftover toppings and set the whole lovely mess to chill in the fridge for about 10 to 15 minutes.
Then, Break into pieces for a unique “bark.”



OK. So I can't resist the fancy decorating...
For this apple, dip completely in dark chocolate. Use a spoon to drizzle white chocolate stripes around the equator of the apple as you turn it slowly. Add a few more horizontal stripes. Use a toothpick or skewer to drag through the layers first up, and then down to create the pattern.