

FOOD OF THE GODS

Absolutely nothing can go wrong when it comes to chocolate, especially as a gift. First of all, chocolate suits any occasion, Valentine's Day most of all. Secondly, chocolate is usually well accepted as a gift. Thirdly, it comes in attractive packagings and tastes delicious. Fourthly, is there really anything better than chocolate for your loved ones? The scientific name for the tree from which chocolate is derived is 'Theobroma cacao', which in Greek means 'food of the gods'. Need we say more? Chocolate is simply the perfect gift.

As it turns out, choosing the best chocolate actually requires more than just the ability to recognize the difference in brands and prices. Apparently, famous brand and expensive price do not necessarily guarantee good quality chocolate.

To help you identify the characters of good chocolate, we asked two prominent chocolatiers in Indonesia, Thierry Detournay of Chocolate Monggo and Francis of L'Atelier du Chocolat, for their quality

ts. The essential step in choosing the best chocolate, as suggested by Thierry Detournay, is to find out what's actually in it. "Generally it is very important to understand what we eat", he said, "Especially for chocolate as there is no clear legislation about what is real chocolate and what is an imitation chocolate. In Indonesia, the rule from the Health Department is that a product can be called "chocolate" if it contains a minimum of 35% of cocoa and whatever the other 65% are." Therefore, paying attention to the ingredients is essential.

According to Thierry, there are three main categories in the quality of chocolate. The first is the Couverture. "Simply the best, it contains higher proportion of cocoa and is made of cocoa liquor", said Thierry. Cocoa liquor is a mix of cocoa solids and cocoa butter. Do note that although the chocolate ingredients mention the cocoa butter, there must be 100% of cocoa butter to qualify as Couverture. "The taste of the chocolate is stronger, it melts smoothly in the mouth, the color is shiny and it is cracking between the teeth. This is the quality used by the best chocolatiers all over the world,"

Thierry said, adding the characteristics of Couverture.

The second category is the Compound. This type of chocolate is made of cocoa powder. The cocoa butter content is close to zero and is replaced by other fats which are mostly vegetable fats such as palm oil and corn oil, and sometimes also animal fats, which we have to avoid. It is considered low quality chocolate and sometimes it is not even considered chocolate at all. Chocolate expert Francis Mestre explained that fine chocolate contained only cocoa mass, cocoa butter, sugar and vanilla, while low quality 'chocolate' contained other unhealthy substances such as sugar, vegetable fat, vanilla aroma or even chocolate aroma. "It's not healthy to eat chocolate compound," he said, "...it is not allowed for sale in Europe as food. It is only used to make shop decor." Unfortunately, Compound quality chocolate is 80% of what you can find in Indonesia. So once again, carefully check the ingredients before you decide to buy or eat certain chocolate.

The third category is the Hybrid, which is made of cocoa liquor but also contains vegetable fats. It is used for chocolate bars and can have a very decent quality depending on the percentage of cocoa butter used. The production cost is lower than the Couverture. Many of the European chocolate brands which are imported to Indonesia are made of Hybrid chocolate. "As chocolate lover, I would definitely go for the Couverture that has 100% cocoa butter", said Thierry.

Now that you know what makes good chocolate, will you even consider putting unhealthy substances into your body or giving them to your loved?



Thierry

What is chocolate bloom?

The blooming of chocolate is the result of a chocolate being exposed to drastic temperature change. In hot conditions the chocolate will sweat and if later the sweaty chocolate goes into the fridge or cooler temperature, it will bloom. The blooming is especially visible on dark chocolate, and creates light brown spots. The chocolate is still consumable but sometimes the blooming makes the texture rough.

Why do you think makes chocolate a popular gift on Valentine's Day?

Since chocolate was introduced in Europe, it immediately became a supreme delicacy for the royal and aristocratic families. Queen Anne of Austria (17th century) was crazy about it and Queen Marie-Antoinette (18th century) had her own recipe for hot chocolate. Women love it and men know that. On top of that you have this myth of chocolate creating aphrodisiac effects. That's the perfect gift for Valentine's Day, isn't it?



What's the best way to store chocolate?

The ideal way to store chocolate is in a cool and dry place around 16°C with 60% humidity and protection from odors. It's better if you have a wine cooler at home to store your chocolate so you can set the right humidity level. If not, you can keep your favorite chocolate in the fridge even if it's not recommended. But then again, we have no choice in tropical weather. Place it in an airtight container first and don't open the container directly when you remove it from the fridge, to prevent the chocolate from blooming.