

World Chocolate Day

Did you know that there's a World Chocolate Day? It takes place each year on 7th July. To celebrate it, read about the history of chocolate and the interesting journey from cocoa bean to chocolate bar.

A brief history of chocolate

Chocolate was first used as a drink over 3,500 years ago in Central America. It was very popular with the Mayans and the Aztecs, who mixed cocoa beans with vanilla or chilli peppers. In fact, cocoa beans were so important to them that they were used as money. Cocoa was first grown in Ecuador, which was, for a long time, the world's number-one producer of cocoa beans. It is still one of the top ten producers of the beans, but nowadays more than 70 per cent of cocoa beans come from West Africa.

Cocoa beans

Cocoa beans come from cocoa trees. These trees grow in tropical forests around the world, from South America to Indonesia. The beans grow in colourful pods of red, yellow and purple. Inside the pods are the beans. Each tree grows around 50 pods a year, and each pod can

Contain between 20 and 60 beans. It takes around 100 beans to make 100 grams of chocolate. The pods are picked by hand to protect the trees.

Preparing the beans

Once the pods are picked from the tree, they are opened and the beans are taken out. The beans need to go through a number of different processes before they are ready to be turned into chocolate. First, the beans and the pulp are placed in special boxes, where they slowly ferment for up to five days. Here the beans turn brown and start to develop their special flavour. They are then put out in the sun to dry for approximately 14 days. After this, they are roasted for about 15 minutes in preparation for the final stage, when the beans are taken out of their shells. At the end of this process, we are left with the cocoa 'nibs' – chocolate in its purest form and the basic ingredient for all chocolate products.

From cocoa nibs to chocolate liquor

The first step is to grind the nibs by machine or between two large stones. This produces cocoa liquor, a semi-solid paste. This is then cooked and mixed continuously for hours or even days until it is just right. This is also the stage at which other ingredients are added: sugar, milk, various flavours. Interestingly, chocolate melts at 34°C. This is just below body temperature, which explains why it can be so sticky and messy, but also why it melts as soon as you put it in your mouth.

From liquid to solid

At this point the cocoa nibs are ready for the last stage in the journey. For the cocoa liquor to turn into solid chocolate, it needs to be heated and cooled and heated again until it forms a solid mass. And so, at last, the journey from bean to bar is complete.

So now you know all about how chocolate is made, you may want to celebrate the day by eating one of your favourite chocolate treats!

Task 1

Write a number (1–6) to put the ideas in the order they are mentioned in the text.

1. _____ Drying the beans in the sun
2. _____ Taking the beans from the pod
3. _____ Grinding the beans
4. _____ Taking the pods from the trees
5. _____ Adding other ingredients
6. _____ Roasting the beans

Task 2

Circle the best answer.

1. The grow on trees.
a. beans b. pods c. Bars
2. The trees grow
a. on mountains b. in the tropics c. near rivers
3. Most cocoa beans are grown in
a. Ecuador b. West Africa c. Ghana
4. The beans are roasted for
a. 5 days b. 14 days c. 15 minutes
5. The purest form of chocolate is the cocoa
a. nib b. liquor c. paste
6. Chocolate turns to liquid at temperature.
a. a very high b. a very low c. around body