

CANDY

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What makes them so appealing is the intriguing contrast between the sweet chocolate and the faintly bitter peel. But you have to get the bitterness just right; you don't want it overwhelming the chocolate.

If you cut a thin slice of peel, cutting shallow with a vegetable peeler to avoid any of the white pith, it is an easy matter. Just blanch the skin, boil it in sugar water and dry it in a bed of sugar. But some, including me, prefer a thicker piece of peel that includes the pith. In that case, you merely have to blanch it three times before continuing with the other steps.

I made it both ways, and with the peels of other citrus fruit, too: grapefruit, tangerines, lemons and limes. All were simply superb, and worthy of an Easter gift.

My most ambitious was next, a malted crisp tart. This is a malted-milk tart that I wanted to make because I am particularly fond of those little malted milk ball eggs at Easter.

It has a lot of steps. Each one is easy, but you need to know going in that you are going to use every bowl you have in the house.

Step one is a brown sugar crust, an unusually delectable crust that also involves flour, malted milk powder (such as Ovaltine or Carnation), vanilla and a great deal of butter. Step two is caramelized Rice Krispies, which is both easier and more time-consuming than you would expect. Even so, it only takes about 10 minutes.

Step three is a rich milk chocolate ganache made all the more delicious by a little more malted milk powder. And step four is a malted diplomat cream, a delicate pastry cream with, yes, a little more malted milk powder.

You might think, with all the malted milk powder, that this tart would be like a malted milk in a crust, but it is really much more subtle and multifaceted than that — even with crunchy malted milk balls strewn across the top.

My next treat was fussier, but sublime: chocolate orange truffles.

The chocolate part is actually white chocolate; you could use regular chocolate if you want to, but why would you want to? The orange part comes from both candied orange peel and a splash of orange liqueur, such as Cointreau or Grand Marnier (or triple sec, come to think of it, which would have been cheaper). And the truffle part comes from heavy cream and more white chocolate.

Like all chocolate truffles, they melt in your mouth. When making them, unfortunately, they also melt in your hands, so they take longer to set than you might expect. I put mine in the refrigerator overnight, and that did the trick.

Once you try one, and you taste that luxurious truffle wrapped in white chocolate with the graceful notes of orange, any memories of sticky chocolate on your fingers will fly away forever.

The next treat I made was the very simplest: chocolate-dipped strawberries. Yes, they're easy, but there is a trick to making them so that the chocolate does not break off when you bite it.

Vegetable shortening. That's the secret. It's really not much of a secret, as secrets go, but it makes all the difference. A couple of

tablespoons of vegetable shortening makes the chocolate smooth and pliable, so it clings deliciously to the strawberries.

My final Easter treat was the caramels, for the weirdos who prefer them to chocolate.

There is nothing quite like a homemade caramel, and the store-bought kind are certainly nothing like them.

These homemade caramels are soft and chewy, smooth and buttery and rich. They are satisfyingly nostalgic, like the best parts of your childhood all wrapped up in a waxed paper wrapper.

But they still aren't as good as chocolate.

CANDIED ORANGE PEELS (THIN VERSION)

Yield: 8 servings

2 large navel oranges, or an equivalent amount of grapefruit, lemons, limes, tangerines or mandarins, or a combination
1 3/4 cups granulated sugar, divided, plus more if necessary
4 ounces chopped milk chocolate, semisweet or bittersweet chocolate

1. Use a vegetable peeler to peel wide, long strips of just the orange part of the orange skin (or the green part of the lime skin, etc.). Try to get as little of the bitter white pith as you can; if you have too much, you can carefully scrape some of it off with a sharp knife.

2. Set a small pan with at least 1 inch of water over high heat to boil. Spread 1 cup of sugar across a plate. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or nonstick foil.

3. Place the fruit peels in the boiling water for 15 seconds, and strain.

4. In a small pan, combine 3/4 cup sugar with 1/2 cup fresh water over high heat. Stir until dissolved and bring to a simmer. Add the fruit peels and boil until the entire surface of the liquid is covered with rapid, small bubbles, about 10 minutes.

5. Remove fruit peels with a fork and immediately place in the plate of sugar. Flip the peels over so both sides are covered with sugar. Press the peels down into the sugar so they are thoroughly saturated with it. Cover with more sugar, if necessary, and let sit 30 minutes. You can reserve the fruit-flavored syrup for cocktails, if you like.

6. Place a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water; do not let the bottom of the bowl touch the water. Add the chocolate and stir until melted. Dip half of each candied peel into the chocolate and place on prepared baking sheet to set.

7. Without chocolate, the candied peels can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for a few weeks. With the chocolate, they can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 1 week.

Per serving: 190 calories; 6g fat; 3g saturated fat; 1mg cholesterol; 1g protein; 35g carbohydrate; 30g sugar; 2g fiber; 2mg sodium; 28mg calcium
 — Recipe by Jacques Pepin

CANDIED ORANGE PEELS (THICK VERSION)

Yield: 8 servings

2 large navel oranges, or an equivalent amount of grapefruit, lemons, limes, tangerines or mandarins, or a combination
3 1/2 cups granulated sugar, divided
8 ounces chopped milk chocolate, semisweet or bittersweet chocolate

1. Cut the fruit into quarters and peel the fruit, keeping the peels intact. Slice the peels into



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Chocolate orange truffles.

pieces about 1/8 inch wide. Set a small pan with at least 1 1/2 inches of water over high heat to boil. Spread 2 cups of sugar across a plate. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or nonstick foil.

2. Place the fruit peels in the boiling water for 30 seconds, and strain. Repeat twice more with fresh changes of water.

3. In a small pan, combine 1 1/2 cups of the sugar with 1 cup fresh water over high heat. Stir until dissolved and bring to a simmer. Add the fruit peels and boil until the entire surface of the liquid is covered with rapid, small bubbles, about 10 minutes.

4. Remove fruit peels with a fork and immediately place in the plate of sugar. Flip the peels over so both sides are covered with sugar. Press the peels down into the sugar so they are thoroughly saturated with it. Let sit 30 minutes. Discard the remaining sugar, but reserve the fruit-flavored syrup for cocktails, if you like.

5. Place a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water; do not let the bottom of the bowl touch the water. Add the chocolate and stir until melted. Remove from the heat. Working in batches, submerge a few pieces of the peel into the chocolate, remove with a fork and place on the prepared baking sheet to set.

6. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 1 week.

Per serving: 321 calories; 10g fat; 6g saturated fat; 2mg cholesterol; 2g protein; 55g carbohydrate; 48g sugar; 4g fiber; 4mg sodium; 37mg calcium
 — Recipe by Jacques Pepin

MALTED CRISP TART

Yield: 8 to 12 servings

For the brown sugar crust

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon malted milk powder, such as plain (not chocolate) Ovaltine or Carnation
10 tablespoons (1 1/4 sticks) butter, cut into cubes and chilled
1/2 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the caramelized crispies

1/2 cup granulated sugar
2 cups crisped rice cereal, such as Rice Krispies

For the milk chocolate ganache

8 ounces good-quality milk chocolate, coarsely chopped
2/3 cup heavy cream
2 teaspoons malted milk powder

For the malted diplomat cream

1 1/4 cups whole milk
1/3 cup granulated sugar
1 large egg yolk
1 large egg
1 tablespoon plus 1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch
2 tablespoons malted milk powder
2 tablespoons butter
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
5 ounces (1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons) heavy cream

For the tart assembly

1 cup crushed malted milk balls
Malted milk balls, to garnish
Caramelized crispies, to garnish
Note: The tart dough (unbaked) and the caramelized crispies can be made the day before you make the rest.

1. Make the brown sugar crust:

Spray a napkin or paper towel with vegetable oil and use the napkin to apply the oil to the sides and bottom (and nooks and crannies) of the tart pan.

2. Place the flour, salt, malted milk powder, butter, sugar and vanilla in a food processor and pulse until the mixture is crumbly.

3. Scoop the crumb mixture into the prepared tart pan and use your hands to press the mixture into the bottom and up the sides of the tart pan. The crust should not look too thick.

4. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Place the tart pan in the freezer for 20 minutes.

5. Remove the tart pan from the freezer; place on a baking sheet and bake until the tart is golden brown, about 20 to 30 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack and cool completely.

6. Make the caramelized crispies: Line a half-sheet baking pan with a sheet of aluminum foil sprayed with vegetable oil.

7. In a medium saucepan over low heat, stir together 2 tablespoons water with the sugar and bring just to a very low boil for about 1 minute.

8. Add the crisped rice cereal and stir until the mixture is dry. Keep stirring until sugar begins to caramelize and the pan begins to smoke; this will take several minutes (any dried white sugar on the bottom of the pan will eventually melt). Fold the mixture over and over until all the crispies are coated with an amber layer of sugar. Once the crispies are completely coated, turn them out onto the sprayed foil and cool completely.

9. Breakup up the caramelized crispies into large chunky pieces and set aside.

10. Make the milk chocolate ganache: Place the milk chocolate in a medium-size heatproof bowl.

11. In a small saucepan over low heat, whisk together the heavy cream and malt powder. Bring the mixture to a simmer (tiny bubbles will form around the edges of the cream; it should not be a rolling boil). Remove from the heat and pour over the milk chocolate. Let the mixture stand for 2 minutes. Starting in the center of the bowl and working your way out to the edges, whisk the chocolate ganache in a circle until completely smooth.

12. To begin assembling the tart: Gently pour the ganache into the cooled tart shell. Top with crushed malted milk balls and 1 cup caramelized crunchies. Very gently press the crushed malt balls and caramelized crunchies into the ganache. Refrigerate the tart while you make the malted diplomat cream.

13. Make the malted diplomat cream: Set a fine-mesh sieve over a medium bowl.

14. In a medium saucepan, bring the milk to a simmer and keep warm.

15. In a medium bowl, whisk the sugar, egg yolk, egg, cornstarch and malted milk powder together until the mixture is pale, about 1 minute.

16. Whisk half of the warm milk into the egg yolk mixture, then pour the mixture into the remaining milk in the saucepan and cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until thickened, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and whisk in the butter and vanilla. Strain the pastry cream through the sieve and press a piece of plastic wrap directly onto the surface

of the cream to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate about 1 hour until chilled.

17. Remove the pastry cream from the refrigerator and whip until creamy. In a separate bowl, whip the heavy cream with a whisk (or use an electric mixer) until soft peaks form. Fold whipped cream into the pastry cream.

18. Finish assembling the tart: Remove the tart from the refrigerator and cover the milk chocolate malt layer with the malted diplomat cream. Garnish with a few whole malt balls and caramelized crispies. Refrigerate the tart to set up, about 30 minutes. The tart can be stored, tightly covered, in the refrigerator for up to 2 days.

Per serving (based on 12): 555 calories; 29g fat; 19g saturated fat; 89mg cholesterol; 6g protein; 69g carbohydrate; 47g sugar; 1g fiber; 175mg sodium; 493mg calcium
 — Recipe from "Baked Explorations" by Matt Lewis and Renato Poliafito

CHOCOLATE ORANGE TRUFFLES

Yield: 24 servings

1/3 cup heavy cream
16 ounces white chocolate, chopped, divided
2 tablespoons butter
4 teaspoons orange liqueur, such as Cointreau, Grand Marnier or triple sec
1/4 cup candied orange peel, finely chopped, see note
2 ounces semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
Note: Candied orange peel is available online. If you want to make it yourself, peel an orange and slice the peel into strips 1/8 inch wide. Blanch peel in boiling water three times for 30 seconds each time, changing the water each time. Mix 3/4 cup granulated sugar with 1/2 cup water, and add peels. Bring to a boil and boil until rapid, small bubbles cover the entire surface of the liquid, about 10 minutes. Remove peels with a fork and immediately place in a plate of granulated sugar. Flip peels to cover both sides with sugar, and press peels into the sugar to completely saturate them. Let stand 30 minutes before chopping.

1. Make ganache by putting the cream into a small saucepan and heat to just below boiling point. Stir in half of the white chocolate (8 ounces) and the butter until smooth. Add the liqueur and orange peel, then transfer the mixture to a bowl and refrigerate until firm. This may take several hours.

2. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Using a teaspoon, scoop up small amounts of ganache, shape into balls with your hands and place on the baking sheet.

3. Melt the remaining 8 ounces white chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over a saucepan of barely simmering water, making sure the surface of the water does not touch the bowl. Let cool for a few minutes — do not skip this step or the chocolate will seize.

4. If the balls of ganache soften before you are ready to dip them in the melted white chocolate (step 5), place them in the refrigerator until firm or place them in the freezer for 10 minutes.

5. Using a fork, dip each ganache ball into the melted white chocolate, then return to the lined baking sheet. Return to the refrigerator until set.

6. Melt the semisweet chocolate as above and let cool for a few minutes. Spoon the melted semisweet chocolate into a small pastry bag fitted with a thin piping tip, or into a resealable plastic bag with a very small corner cut off. Pipe fine lines onto each truffle and let set. Store the truffles in an airtight container in a cool, dry place for up to 1 week.

Per serving: 150 calories; 8g fat; 5g saturated fat; 8mg cholesterol; 1g protein; 15g carbohydrate; 15g sugar; 1g fiber; 17mg sodium; 41mg calcium
 — Recipe from "Chocolat" by Eric Lanlard

CHOCOLATE-DIPPED STRAWBERRIES

Yield: 12 servings

2 pints strawberries
2 tablespoons vegetable shortening, such as Crisco
6 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped or chocolate chips

Wash and dry strawberries, leaving stems intact. In double boiler over hot, not boiling, water, melt shortening with chocolate. Dip in berries to cover about one-half of the fruit. Place on cookie sheet and refrigerate until set.

Per serving: 110 calories; 6g fat; 3g saturated fat; no cholesterol; 1g protein; 14g carbohydrate; 14g sugar; 2g fiber; 2mg sodium; 14mg calcium
 — Recipe from "Glamour's Gourmet on the Run"

SOFT CANDY CARAMELS

Yield: 81 servings

2 cups light corn syrup
1 cup granulated sugar
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
2 cups heavy cream
2/3 cup condensed milk
8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter, at room temperature, cut into cubes
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 teaspoon salt or fleur de sel

1. Lightly spray a 9-inch square baking pan with nonstick cooking spray and line it with aluminum foil, allowing the foil to just overhang on the sides. Lightly coat the foil with nonstick cooking spray.

2. In a medium saucepan, gently stir together the corn syrup and both sugars along with 1/4 cup water. Set the saucepan over low heat and continue to stir gently until the sugars dissolve (avoid sloshing the sides of the pan). Once the sugar has dissolved, clip a candy thermometer to the side of the pan, turn the heat up to medium-high and wait for the mixture to reach 240 to 245 degrees. Keep a watchful eye on the temperature while you proceed with the next step — you do not want it to exceed 250 degrees.

3. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, stir together the cream and condensed milk and set over medium heat. Gently warm the mixture; do not let it boil.

4. Once the sugar mixture turns amber, remove it from the heat and stir in the butter and warm milk mixture until completely combined (be careful about splattering; it usually bubbles up when you add the milk mixture). Place the pan back on medium heat, stop stirring, and bring the mixture back to 245 to 250 degrees.

5. Remove the pan from the heat, stir in the vanilla and salt, and pour the caramel into the prepared pan. Allow the candy to set for 8 hours, or overnight.

6. To cut and wrap the caramels, place a sheet of parchment over the caramel and invert it onto a cutting surface. Remove the aluminum foil.

7. Spray a chef's knife with nonstick cooking spray or carefully rub a tiny bit of vegetable shortening along the blade. Cut the caramels into 1-inch squares and immediately wrap them in waxed paper or candy papers. Twist the ends of the papers to resemble old-school candies. The caramels will keep in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 10 days.

Per serving: 70 calories; 2g fat; 2g saturated fat; 7mg cholesterol; 1g protein; 13g carbohydrate; 13g sugar; no fiber; 25mg sodium; 13mg calcium

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