

FUDGE

It's hard to beat fudge. It's always reminiscent of Christmas, but there are memories of Mount Rushmore, Savannah Georgia, and the Apple Store near our house. Like any candy, fudge is a science project which requires attention to detail, precise measurements of quantities and temperature, and a bit of understanding as to why it's so much work. The flavor of fudge is easy, it's simply a matter of the quality and proportion of ingredients you use; the secret is in the texture. Crunchy or crystalline fudge isn't so good, so the secret is in keeping the internal sugar crystals as small as possible, giving a creamy smooth texture. If you are going to use nuts in your fudge, be sure to roast them first for a crispy texture and less mealy taste.

INGREDIENTS:

2 $\frac{3}{4}$ Cups Sugar
4 ounces Unsweetened Chocolate
3 Tablespoons Butter, divided, plus a bit more to grease the pan
1 Cup half-and-half
1 Tablespoon Corn Syrup
1 Tablespoon Vanilla Extract
1 Cup Roasted Nuts, chopped (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

If you are going to use nuts and they aren't already roasted, place nuts in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat for 5-6 minutes and toss frequently. Your nose will tell you when they are done.

Grease an 8 by 8 inch pan with butter and cover with parchment paper. This makes it *a lot* easier to get the fudge out of the pan. If you don't have parchment paper don't worry, just grease well.

In a heavy bottomed saucepan, combine the sugar, chocolate, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ Tablespoons of the butter, half-and-half, and the corn syrup. Over medium heat, stir with a wooden spoon until the sugar is dissolved and the chocolate is melted. Increase the heat and bring to a boil. Once it's boiling, reduce the heat to medium low, cover, and boil for 3 minutes.

This step is important because we are making a super-saturated sugar solution (try saying that 3 times) and like any highly concentrated solution, it wants to crystallize. We want to inhibit crystallization as much as possible by eliminating condensation nuclei (you science geeks know what I'm talking about) so covering the pan causes condensation to form on the lid and run down the sides of the saucepan, melting any stray sugar crystals that may act as nuclei now or later.

After 3 minutes, remove the cover and attach a candy thermometer to the pot. Cook, stirring often, until the temperature reads 234 degrees F. Remove from the heat and add the remaining butter on top. **DO NOT STIR.** Let the mixture cool for 90 minutes or until the temperature drops to 110 degrees F.

Add the vanilla and nuts, if desired, and mix until well blended and the shiny texture becomes matte. (For this step, I recommend a stiff plastic spoon. It's pretty thick, and I broke a wooden spoon the first time.) Pour/scrape mixture into your prepared pan and press into the corners and along the edges. Let it sit in a cool dry area until firm, then cut into 1-inch pieces and store in an airtight container.