

## The Chocolate Issue

# Passionate readers reveal chocolate secrets

Some consider this dark, rich sweet a driving force in life

By JENNIFER BAIN  
FOOD EDITOR

The chocoholics have spoken. Hundreds have written to vote for the best chocolate bars, boxed chocolates, chocolate recipes, chocolate shops and more. They've revealed their treasured chocolate secrets in a bid to be named "the biggest chocoholic."

They've made it obvious that while most of us merely enjoy chocolate, others consider it a driving force in daily life. Many insist they've inherit-

ed a chocolate gene.

"Chocolate is a friend who never ever disappoints me," writes Michele Gangbar, who uses chocolate body cream to always smell like chocolate.

Leaho Koo puts on Pachelbel's "Canon in D Major" before indulging in the ritual of eating chocolate.

Daniela "chocoholic, chocomaniac, chocochick" Caruso reserves Sundays as her "divine day for chocolate."

Yaffa Gang eats chocolate chips straight from the bag, convinced the cookie part of chocolate chip cookies "is a waste of time and calories."

Crista de Camp can't drive while eating chocolates, because they make her close her eyes and feel like she's floating as they melt in her mouth.

This melt-in-the-mouth thing seems to be the mark of chocolate

connoisseurs.

Elizabeth Schreurs went to a chocolate shop near Brussels a few years ago, picked "the deepest, darkest chocolates — for real chocolate must be dark," and watched someone hand-wrap them. She savoured the first one outside the shop.

"My girlfriend asked for a sample, and although I had a moment's hesitation in sharing, I gave her one," writes Schreurs. "She chewed it. SHE CHEWED IT. I thought I would cry. She noted: 'That was nice.' I did cry. Trying to explain to her the reverence with which one must eat fine chocolate fell on deaf ears."

Maybe the friend will pay heed to Godiva master chocolatier Thierry Muret's advice on how to select and enjoy fine chocolates:

■ **Look:** Chocolates should have a consistent colour and satiny sheen free of air bubbles or blemishes. Shapes and designs should show craftsmanship.

■ **Smell:** Fine chocolates (boxed or individual) should have a fresh, deep aroma, not the overly perfumed or sugary smell associated with artificial flavours or preservatives.

■ **Taste:** Look for intense but refined flavour, and subtle nuances of texture. The couverture, or outside coating of fine chocolates, is often molded in a sleek, semi-hard shape that "snaps" when you bite into it. The inside centre or filling should complement the couverture's flavour and texture.

Let chocolate melt against the roof of your mouth, urges Muret, to ensure the texture is velvety smooth, not

grainy. Roll chocolate over your tongue, letting the flavours permeate your mouth. Expect a nutty, roasted chocolate flavour first, followed by sweetness or other flavours. Enjoy a longer "finish" or pleasant aftertaste.

Weeks of edible research for this issue have revealed what chocolate aficionados already know: Chocolate bars and mass-produced boxed chocolates need no special care. Fine chocolates (made with premium cacao beans, fresh cream and butter) must be eaten within a week and kept in a cool, dry place. Enjoy them at room temperature and don't even think about refrigerating them.

Chocoholic readers have driven the results in most of the "Best..." categories that follow. But watch for a few Food section favourites.



### Best Miscellaneous Chocolate: Part 1

The accolades for florentines from Canada's own Mary's Gourmet are breathless. Joe Goldfinger describes eating them as "the most wonderful tasting chocolate experience that I can ever remember in almost 60 years." Lidia Vetturetti, who took them on a five-hour mountain trek in Alberta, says they taste even better cold. "Every chocolate lover deserves to know about them," enthuses Bonnie Jean MacDonald. This taste sensation doesn't come cheap: an 8-ounce bag with about 15 pieces costs \$15 at Holt Renfrew's gourmet shop. But Mary Bewick dips crunchy California almonds and Canadian honey into Callebaut Belgian chocolate to create this captivating spin on traditional florentine cookies. You can order Mary's Gourmet Florentines for \$10.99, or find other southern Ontario retail locations, from [www.marysgourmet.com](http://www.marysgourmet.com) or 866-847-4445.