

## Chapter 1

# Candy Making Made Easy (Because It Is)

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Gearing up to make candy
- ▶ Identifying some great confections
- ▶ Checking out special uses for your candy-making skills

### *Recipes in This Chapter*

- ▶ Dream Dates



One point I stress throughout this book is that candy making is pretty easy. After you learn a few basics and prepare yourself and your environment according to my simple guidelines, all you have to do is follow a few procedures. I hate to say this, but if I can make candy, you can make candy.

When I train new staff members in my candy shop, I observe that, at first, they're hesitant and overly careful about handling the product, as if it were very fragile. I assure them that they will not hurt the candy by being aggressive. I don't want them to be afraid of the candy, and you shouldn't be afraid, either. Most products you make are quite tolerant, and you can stir them hard, slap them, or just generally be rough with them. Don't be afraid to get your hands a little messy, and don't worry about making a bit of a mess. Have fun, because you're in charge.

To make a point, when someone observes that I have a spot of chocolate on my face, I dab even more on and ask, "Where, here?" Then I touch another spot with a big dab and ask, "Or was it here?" Before I finish, I have chocolate all over my face, but the new person is relaxed, confident that I am crazy and not worried about making a mess. I want you to have that feeling without my having to come to your house to make a fool of myself. And before I continue with the "newbie," I wash up. I do have a few rules.

In this chapter, I introduce you to my world: the world of candy making. I introduce you to the basics of preparation, tell you about a variety of sweet treats, and share tips for special candy situations. Through this book, I hope you'll acquire some of the affection for confection that I have. Candy has been very good to me, to paraphrase the old *Saturday Night Live* line, and I have made a career of pleasing folks with simple confections. Now you have the opportunity to bring a little joy to your family and loved ones as well as to yourself.

## Putting together the candy-making puzzle

Since I was a teenager, one of my favorite pastimes has been working crossword puzzles. When I was in high school, I attempted to solve the daily crossword in the Atlanta newspaper; most days, I filled in only a few of the answers. The next day, I looked up the answers to see what I missed. I gradually learned patterns that puzzle makers used, and I learned that they repeated answers, occasionally rewording the clues. I eventually became an excellent crossword solver, and I am one of those weirdos who does the *New York Times* Sunday puzzle in ink. Although I may not finish the puzzle in 15 minutes, I seldom fail to complete the grid in 30 minutes to an hour.

The point — which I am coming to — is that if you look at the clues for a large puzzle, the maze

of blocks can look impossible. If you read the answers in a completed grid, you see that, in most cases, the answers are really quite simple. You only sensed difficulty because of the clues.

Similarly, if you walk into a fine chocolate shop and look at some of the beautiful items on display, you may think that you could never make those items. However, the “clues,” or the steps in the recipes, are really quite easy. You need only to acquire some knowledge and apply it to the steps as I specify. You will find that these simple clues lead to some very sophisticated results, chocolate and otherwise.

## Getting Set to Make Candy

Your journey to becoming a candy-making expert begins with the simplest preparations. You must properly prepare yourself in terms of kitchen space, utensils, and ingredients. The better you prepare yourself for cooking, the easier your experience will be and the quicker you will become adept at making candy.



Now, I certainly don't expect you to reproduce a candy kitchen in your home. But I do believe that the closer you come to creating a cool, dry environment and the better equipped you are with basic candy tools, the better your results will be. Factor in using only quality ingredients, and you're in pretty good shape.

In this section, I discuss how to prepare your kitchen and tell you about the tools and ingredients you need for your candy.

## *Ensuring that you and your kitchen are ready*



As you read through this book, you'll find numerous opportunities to make some great candies, and the hardest decision may be where to start. What should you do first? A good idea is to read several recipes that catch your eye and find something pretty simple. I've tried to make all the recipes in this book easy, but some are easier than others. Try one or two simple recipes and then select a recipe for a candy that you or someone in your family would really enjoy. Make that recipe. At that point you've gained confidence, and you're on your way.

I know you can't turn your home kitchen into a candy kitchen any more than you can turn it into a restaurant when you prepare dinner. Your objective, then, should be to create the best atmosphere possible to assure that your candies turn out great. You want a cool, dry environment to make a lot of candies, with an ideal room temperature of 70 to 72 degrees. Organize your ingredients; make sure that you have plenty of counter space; and check to see that your equipment is in working order, too.

See Chapter 2 for more ideas about how to prepare yourself and your kitchen before you begin making candies.

### **Considering a candy kitchen tour**

If you've never visited a candy kitchen where the staff makes the candy in public view, you may want to do so before you make your first recipe so you can get some ideas about what you're trying to do. In my experience, actually seeing the candy being made has had a major influence on my understanding of what the results should look like.

When I suggest visiting a candy shop, I'm not talking about just a fudge shop; rather, look for a kitchen that produces a vast array of candies. (I mention a few candy kitchens that you can visit in Chapter 25.) Quality candy makers are found in most cities of any size and in a lot of smaller ones, like my little village. In a candy kitchen, you can see professionals making caramels, pralines, jellies, fudge, divinity, and a

wide variety of chocolate items. Also, a visit to such a candy shop allows you to find some really creative packaging ideas for gifts you can make and give to loved ones. Even if the shop sells only candy that it purchased from others, you still see results that can give you direction.

When you see an actual working candy kitchen, make mental notes about the layout, the utensils the staff uses, and how the staff utilizes space. You may also ask general questions; the staff will usually provide you with good answers that should be quite helpful to you. Your questions shouldn't include queries about temperatures or specific ingredient measures because these elements fall into the proprietary area. At any rate, your visit should help you make basic preparations in your own kitchen.

## Speaking the language of candy making

In the early years of my business — back when we made few candies ourselves — I found recipes in cookbooks and magazines, and I got some recipes from a few friends. Invariably, I would encounter a tool I didn't have and didn't know how to locate, or I would run into some candy term having to do with production that I simply didn't understand.

Candy makers often have their own language, and if you don't understand what the terms mean, you may be unable to make what actually is a very simple recipe. I avoid using candy-making jargon throughout this book, and if I use a jargony term, I explain what it means. So don't worry; the recipes in this book won't confuse you with candy-making speak.

## *Finding the proper tools*

Aside from having the necessary ingredients, few things expedite production like having the right tools for the task at hand. For a full list of the equipment you need, check out Chapter 3. Most utensils you use in candy making are available in a grocery or discount store; kitchen stores and commercial equipment suppliers are two other options. You can also find many specialty items online (see Chapter 24 for a list of online suppliers).



Some of the handiest tools you can use include

- ✓ Measuring tools, such as measuring cups, measuring spoons, candy thermometers, and chocolate thermometers
- ✓ Pots and pans, including a double boiler, saucepans, baking pans, and cookie sheets
- ✓ Kitchen essentials, such as large knives, microwaveable bowls, spoons, whisks, and spatulas
- ✓ Small appliances, such as food processors and mixers
- ✓ Specialty tools, such as a marble slab, a piping bag, dipping tools, and chocolate molds
- ✓ Tools for cooling and storage, such as cooling racks and plastic containers

## *Using great ingredients*

Most candy recipes use ingredients that you can find at your local grocery store. Among the most important types of ingredients are

- ✓ **Sugars and sweeteners:** These ingredients form the basis for virtually all candy recipes. You can use solid sweeteners, such as granulated sugar,

confectioners' sugar, and brown sugar; you can also put liquid sweeteners, such as corn syrup and honey, to good use.

- ✓ **Dairy products:** "Cream" has many meanings in the world of candy making. The cream used to make fine candies may range from 10 percent butterfat (with the use of half-and-half) to more than 40 percent butterfat (with the use of heavy cream), and how a recipe turns out depends on what type of cream you use. Other useful dairy ingredients include butter, whole milk, condensed milk, and sweetened evaporated milk.
- ✓ **Nuts:** People can be very particular about the nuts they like in their candy. Some of the most popular nuts are peanuts, pecans, walnuts, and cashews. Nuts provide a wonderful crunch in candies, and they impart their own special, delicious flavors.
- ✓ **Chocolate:** You should appreciate the fine differences among the types of chocolates, in terms of the range from white to extra dark and in regard to quality. You can cut corners in quality, but I never recommend doing so; don't save a few pennies on a major ingredient if you want good results. The chocolate substitutions I offer as variations of recipes don't lower the quality of your candy; I offer those substitutions quite often so you can make varieties of a recipe with similar results.



When you gather the ingredients for a recipe, know that I had a reason for making those choices and that variations may produce different results than what the recipe intended.

Chapter 4 has everything you need to know about choosing and using the preceding ingredients. I also provide you with a list of less common (but still important) candy ingredients.

## Putting your own twist on candy recipes

A number of years ago, I didn't know how to make a meltaway. Heck, I didn't even know what to call the piece; I simply knew how to describe it. I called four friends to get suggestions on how to make it, and I described the piece to them. Fortunately, they all knew what I was talking about and gave me satisfactory answers. However, each one also said that I might ask someone else, because that person made meltaways differently.

I discovered something that day: You can make the same basic candy many different ways because each person used a different process.

As you create candies from my recipes, you may find that you can do the same thing with modifications. If a recipe calls for corn syrup, for instance, try honey instead. Make a toffee or a brittle with a different nut than you usually use. Follow a basic truffle recipe, but substitute a spice or an unusual flavor that you've never tasted in candy. Go for it; by taking such actions, you become a true candy maker. You need to go beyond the exact recipes at some point. By doing so in my own kitchen, I create new pieces all the time.

## *Checking Out Delicious Types of Candies*

I understand that you're capable of enjoying just so much of my text. Ultimately, you need to be exposed to some recipes, and you're not to be disappointed. You find about 100 recipes, and I group them by types of candies: creamy and chewy, nutty, and chocolaty.



Before you try any recipe, read through the available recipes and find one you're certain that you understand. Make that recipe first to get the feel of what you're doing, and move on from there. You should be able to prepare any candy in the book simply by following the directions I offer. If you feel like you need to ease into the more difficult recipes, you have that opportunity.

### *Fixing creamy and chewy treats*

You encounter many excellent recipes in Part II, which features creamy and chewy concoctions.

In Chapter 5, I tell you how to prepare fondue. Fondue is a versatile treat that makes a nice interactive dessert; each family member gets to create his or her own special treat. Fondues are also great for romantic settings.

Chapter 6 includes directions for making fondant — a combination of sugar corn syrup, and water — that you can use to prepare other candies, such as mints. One nice thing about this fondant recipe is that you don't have to do any cooking to make it.

Another candy you make in Chapter 6 is the meltaway, which you can make in several flavors. The meltaway, a smooth piece that usually includes chocolate and some added fat (don't let that word scare you), is easy to make, and you should derive some pleasure from making something so good with so little effort.

Caramel is a major piece of the candy puzzle and, in Chapter 7, you find tasty caramel recipes that you can use in making other candies. You can make so many great candies using caramel, like caramel apples, caramel pecan clusters, and more.

One of the confections that my company could never be without is divinity, which I cover in Chapter 8. Although divinity is similar in appearance to marshmallow, this confection uses egg whites for aeration, which provides a very light, airy piece.

In Chapter 9, you find recipes for fudge. Fudge is one of those things that seems to bring a smile to folks' faces, so be prepared to create a few smiles as you make your own fudge. With the recipes in Chapter 9, you can make simple

microwave fudge and progress to cooked fudges, which require a little more time. Cooked fudges involve actual cooking in a saucepan, which takes you a bit closer to being a real candy maker. You should enjoy the variety of flavors of fudge as well.

Chapter 10 provides you with easy recipes for good, light homemade marshmallows and fruit jellies. Marshmallows and jellies are cousins in the candy world because you make both with gelatin. You can master these candies using one flavor and, with only a couple of changes, you can make a variety of flavors. You even have the chance to make a very easy marzipan (for those of you who like that almond-based candy).

## *Noshing on nut-based candies*

Sometimes you just have to get a little nutty, and you can fulfill that urge with a nice variety of the nutty confections in Part III.

One truly great candy that you commonly find in a candy shop is toffee, a buttery-rich, crunchy confection that's cooked to about 300 degrees. I show you how to make toffee as well as its cousin, the crunch, in Chapter 11. Crunches contain slightly less butter than toffees, but you still get a great buttery taste.

I also cover the praline in Chapter 11. This candy, which has Southern roots, is a delightful confection traditionally made with sugar, corn syrup, butter, and pecans. You should enjoy making this one; I know I do!

The first candy that my wife and I ever made was peanut brittle. In Chapter 12, you have your own chance to make some peanut brittle as well as a few other brittle variations. Brittles are cooked to a high temperature (around 300 degrees), so you're doing some serious cooking. But I think you'll enjoy the results.

If you consider popcorn to be a salty movie treat, I have a few surprises in store for you. In Chapter 13, I show you how to take basic popcorn and make a caramely, nutty treat. You also can add white chocolate to make a delightfully sweet, melt-in-your-mouth confection that almost seems cool when you eat it. You won't think of popcorn as just a snack for movies anymore.

From pralines to toffee to pecan rolls, you should be able to find a nutty confection to match your taste as well as your family's. Think of the smiles on your family members' faces when they taste the delicious pecan rolls you make for them. Imagine how they'll praise you for your peanut or pecan brittle. You will be so loved!

Meanwhile, I offer you an extremely simple nut-based recipe to get you started on your candy-making journey.

### *Dream Dates*

This not-too-sweet treat — which includes roasted almonds, dates, confectioners' sugar, cocoa, and cinnamon — is good for so many occasions. You can offer it when a few friends come over and you don't want to tempt them with something too heavy or too sweet (not to mention that you can make this in just a few minutes).

**Preparation time:** 10 minutes

**Yield:** 45 pieces

*1¾ cups pitted dates (about 45)*

*1 teaspoon unsweetened cocoa*

*¾ cup whole roasted, salted or unsalted almonds (about 90)*

*½ teaspoon cinnamon*

*½ cup confectioners' sugar*

- 1 Stuff each date with two of the almonds.
- 2 In a freezer bag, combine confectioners' sugar, cocoa, and cinnamon, and seal the bag. Shake the bag well to blend the ingredients and pour the contents onto a small plate.
- 3 Roll each date in the mixture to coat. You can store the dates overnight in a plastic container at room temperature.

**Per serving:** Calories 36 (From Fat 10); Fat 1g (Saturated 0g); Cholesterol 0mg; Sodium 0mg; Carbohydrate 7g (Dietary Fiber 1g); Protein 1g.



## *Entering the wide world of chocolate*

My personal area of candy making, and that of many others, is the world of chocolate. Of all the candy that is made in my kitchens, nothing gives me the satisfaction that chocolate brings. In Part IV, I introduce you to the joy of chocolate and offer you the opportunity to put this information to work.

To coat and decorate many chocolate confections, you must temper the chocolate. *Tempering* is a controlled process of heating and cooling chocolate using movement to achieve the proper temperature and crystal structure so that your candy has a nice, glossy finish. It isn't rocket science, and you find that out in Chapter 14; you just need to know how to properly chop and melt chocolate in a double boiler or microwave. You can use one of several methods to temper: hand tempering, chunk tempering, or machine tempering. After you achieve the basic skills necessary, you're on your way to a lifetime of pleasure. I make the tempering process as easy as possible for you, but the only way to become proficient in handling chocolate is by getting your hands into the chocolate pot.



Chapter 15 is all about dipping treats into chocolate. You can dip treats by hand or using special dipping tools, and the variety of items you can dip is endless. The list includes fruits, pretzels, and much more.

Chapter 16 gives you the lowdown on barks and clusters. These two candies have the same ingredients (usually chocolate and nuts), but you shape them in different ways:

- ✓ Bark is poured into sheets and cut into bar-size pieces.
- ✓ Clusters are shaped into bite-size pieces about 1½ inches wide.

Chapter 17 covers creams, which are sugar-based centers. You find out how to make different cream centers and what to do with them when they're set: You dip them in your favorite chocolate, of course!

Chapter 18 is all about delectable truffles, which I put at the top of the list of the finest chocolate products available. The truffle, which is basically a rich center of chocolate and cream encased in a thin shell of chocolate, is simply one fine bite. Actually, most truffles are just that: one bite. I show you how to make, roll, and coat truffle centers. I also guide you on piping thin (but still rich) centers into chocolate shells.

Chapter 19 presents several fun methods on molding chocolates: solid molding, hollow molding, and shell molding. You can mold chocolates for so many different occasions, and you're pretty much limited only by your imagination; you can find a mold for just about anything you can think of.

## *Looking at Special Candy Considerations*

Of course, you may be the type of person who plans to make every recipe in the book, sit down at a table, and eat every bit yourself — but I doubt it. Many folks like to make candy to give as gifts for friends, and many of these confections fit the bill nicely for a number of occasions. I show you some specific ideas for making holiday candies, which I hope will be an enjoyable process for you. Finally, you may want to make some special treats with the kids in your life, so I provide the opportunity for the younger set to go into the kitchen with recipes that are fun for them and for you.

### *Celebration time: Making festive holiday candies*

As you consider what you can do to make a holiday occasion special, think about the lovely candies you make. For example, think about what treats you can make to put in an Easter basket. Give some thought to hand-crafting the beautiful chocolates commonly found in an expensive Valentine box. Think about the atmosphere the aroma of freshly made candy creates at Christmas

time. With the recipes in this book, you're able to fill these needs yourself and create holiday magic (with the help of Chapter 20) for much less than you would spend in a store. Plus you can take pride in the fact that you made the candy yourself. You didn't simply give a gift or add to the festivities; you *earned* the accolades that came your way.

## ***Look what I did today! Making kid-friendly candies***

If you find yourself growing weary of dragging your kids to the store for their special treats, why not let them make their own goodies at home? Your kids can make simple treats with cereal, chips, cookies, and marshmallows using the recipes in Chapter 21. The list of ingredients your kids can use to make their own treats is long, and you may think of some that I haven't mentioned. One nice thing about making these candies is that you have no rules to follow. If you like it, go for it! Give the kids some candy-making guidelines, and turn them loose. (Save the harder tasks for yourself, of course.)

If you think you're proud of your creations, imagine how good the younger ones feel when they produce something worthy of your praise. And once you have them doing their own thing, you free up your own time!

## ***Give a little bit (or a lot): Presenting candies with style***

Once you have the ability to create some special candies, you probably will want to give some as gifts. Maybe giving gifts was your primary reason for making candy in the first place. At any rate, you find plenty of ideas in Chapter 22 for creating gifts with the treats you've made.



Before you select the container for any gift, picking the theme and size of your gift is essential. When you make those choices, you have various container options:

- ✓ Mugs, cups, and glasses
- ✓ Boxes and tins
- ✓ Baskets and trays
- ✓ Bags

Wrappings are also a consideration. You may want to wrap pieces in colorful foils or even seasonal foils. To do so, simply place each piece in its own paper cup, just as you see done in candy shops.

Of course, I've given you just a few ideas. The only limit to what you can do with your candy gifts is your imagination.