

Chocolate Can Be Cranky

Chocolate is one of life's most decadent pleasures. One can't even imagine what the world of pastry would be without it—or my mood swings for that matter. Chocolate can also be one of the most complicated ingredients to work with. Just like people, different chocolates have different personalities, which determines how you should treat them.

Dark chocolate: I refer to dark chocolate as the Employee of the Month of chocolates. It is by far the easiest to work with and manipulate. It has less cocoa butter in it than other chocolates, which means when you're melting it you can heat it for longer without risk of burning or overheating.

Milk chocolate: This is the middle child of chocolate (no offense to middle children). It's caught between dark chocolate and white. It's the best of both worlds and also the worst of both worlds. It tends to melt a little bit faster than dark chocolate, so keep this in mind while melting. Check it earlier than you think you should.

White chocolate: This is the most temperamental of the three and needs to be handled gently. I like to say “treat white chocolate like a lady.” When melting white chocolate, it's good practice to stir the chocolate often, even removing it from the heat while stirring. It's the very high cocoa butter content that makes white chocolate burn so easily and quickly.

Seizing: This is the ultimate chocolate crankiness. A chocolate that has “seized” turns lumpy, thick, and impossible to melt. Seizing

can be caused by two things: 1) Overheating or 2) moisture—if even a drop of liquid hits the melted chocolate, it'll seize right up. Unfortunately there is no way to recover seized chocolate (though it's still edible; you just can't cook with it). My advice? Stop and start over.