

The Art of Gift-Giving

In the restaurant business, it's a necessity to impress your guests and leave them with a great feeling so that they'll come back again. I like to send people home with little gifts like small cakes, chocolates, or my favorite in the winter, hot cocoa mix. There's no reason you shouldn't do this for your friends, too.

CHOCOLATE-CARAMEL HOT COCOA MIX

MAKES 20 (1/4-CUP) SERVINGS

Here's a homemade cocoa mix that won't be easily forgotten by your giftee. It's made with homemade caramel powder! Be sure that you include these instructions with your gift: "For 1 mug of hot cocoa, stir 1/4 cup of mix into 3/4 cup boiling water (top with marshmallows)."

1 cup sugar

2 cups nonfat dry milk powder

3/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder, sifted

1/2 cup powdered nondairy creamer

Pinch of kosher salt

1 cup butterscotch chips

Miniature marshmallows (optional)

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a nonstick silicone liner.

In a small saucepan, heat 1/4 cup of the sugar over medium-high heat, stirring until it caramelizes to a medium brown color,

about 10 minutes. Pour the caramel out onto the lined pan and let cool completely. Break up the caramel and grind to a fine powder in a food processor.

In a large bowl, whisk together the caramel powder, milk powder, cocoa, nondairy creamer, salt, butterscotch chips, and the remaining $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar.

Divide the mix among cute containers, such as small vintage canning jars. Top with miniature marshmallows, if desired. The mix will keep at room temperature up to 2 months.

Classic Hot Cocoa Mix: For a simpler version, skip the caramel powder. Use only $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar and replace the butterscotch chips with semisweet chocolate chips. All the other ingredients remain the same, as do the brewing instructions.