

## The Long Journey Of Chocolate From Cacao Beans To Fine Chocolate

All chocolates use cacao beans, from the mass produced stuff inside M&M's to the highest quality product that comes from Belgium. Cacao beans are also the most important ingredient, because even if all the other ingredients that go into the mix are top notch, if the cacao is not high quality the chocolate made from it won't be either. In a process that requires precision from its start at the very beginning when seeds are sown right up to its completion when the chocolate is done, even a slight mishap can spell the difference between chocolates that's good, sure, and chocolate that will knock your socks off.

In a process much like the cultivation of coffee, cacao beans are harvested, fermented and roasted. While this is essential the manufacture of chocolates, it is more or less mechanical and rule bound, so less interesting. Once the roasting is done, however, things start to get more interesting. When the beans have been roasted, they are ground. This means that the cacao beans are shelled, and for most recipes, ground. When the beans are ground they secrete a thick liquid known as cacao liquor, which is used by chocolate manufactures. The liquor can be transformed into three different things, cacao butter, cacao powder, and chocolate. The first two are less dependent on the quality of the beans, and so usually only less remarkable beans are used to make them. The liquor from higher quality beans is most often made into chocolate.

Just because you have high quality cacao liquor doesn't mean that you have high quality chocolate. To get from the liquor to the finished bars or boxes given on Valentine's Day, fine chocolate makers must first add some extra ingredients. At this stage, most makers will add sugar and then regrind the mixture to avoid sandy textures and flavors. After this grinding, the chocolate is heated and mixed together a little bit under boiling temperature, at 180 degrees Fahrenheit. This heated mixing is known in the industry as conching. During conching, chocolate starts to take on the smooth, refined taste for which its finest examples are known. Depending on the desired end product, a chocolate may be conched for an hour, or even a whole day or more.

Conching itself is where much of a chocolate's flavor will come from. One mast chocolate makers secret process of cooking the chocolate can be very different from another's, and will impart a very different end result. Understandably, some chocolate makers can be highly guarded about their exact technique.

After conching, the pure chocolate is then turned into whatever the chocolate maker has in mind, milk chocolate, dark chocolate, cooking chocolate, or whatever else. Every step along the way, though, has to be just as carefully undertaken as those that preceded it.

As you can see, there is a great deal that goes into a simple bar of chocolate. The entire process takes great care, and the slightest mistake can spell disaster, or at least mean that this or that bar will be slightly less heavenly.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

### About the Author

Gregg Hall is an author living in Navarre Florida. Find more about this as well as fine chocolate at <http://www.finechocolategifts.com>