



chai hot cocoa with whipped cream

A mug of steaming hot chocolate is a much-beloved holiday treat, and I like to dress up ordinary cocoa with my own recipe for chai, an Indian spice blend. Hot cocoa isn't as sinful as you might think: scientists have found that dark chocolate is loaded with antioxidants called flavonoids. They help the body destroy free radicals, which are harmful molecules that cause many ailments, such as heart disease. Look for organic fair-trade cocoa powder, such as Green & Black's brand, available in many grocery stores.

| SERVES 4 |

FOR THE CHAI HOT COCOA

- 3 cups/750 ml milk
- 1 cup/250 ml water
- 3 tablespoons cocoa powder
- 2 tablespoons sugar (optional; see Note)
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 5 cardamom pods
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- Pinch cayenne pepper
- Pinch ground cloves
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract (or 1 vanilla bean)
- 4 ounces/110 g bittersweet (60 percent cacao) chocolate (see Note)

FOR THE WHIPPED CREAM

- 2 cups/500 ml heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- Pinch salt

TO MAKE THE CHAI HOT COCOA:

1. Combine the milk, water, cocoa powder, sugar (if using), cinnamon sticks, cardamom pods, ginger, cayenne, cloves, and vanilla in a large saucepan. Heat over medium heat until scalding. Remove from heat and let steep for 10 minutes, then strain into a bowl or pitcher.
2. Transfer the milk back to the saucepan and heat over medium-high heat to scalding. Add the chocolate and stir for 5 minutes, just until chocolate is melted.
3. Strain again and pour into 4 mugs. Top with a dollop of whipped cream.

NOTE: *If you're using chocolate that contains 70 percent cacao, add 2 tablespoons sugar. (The higher the percentage of cacao solids, the more intense and less sweet the chocolate is.) Almost all good-quality chocolate producers list the percentage of cacao on the label.*

TO MAKE THE WHIPPED CREAM:

1. Place a mixing bowl and the beaters of an electric mixer in the refrigerator or freezer for at least 15 minutes.
2. Pour the cream, sugar, vanilla, and salt into the chilled bowl and whip on high speed until soft peaks form.

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Chronicle Books 978-0-8118-6767-2

