

Candy Cane Bark

No cookie tray or holiday gift box would be complete without a generous serving of Candy Cane Bark. And yes, I realize it isn't actually a cookie, but once you discover how easy it is to make and how delicious the results, I think you'll forgive me for taking some liberties.

At first glance it may appear that this recipe only calls for you to melt some chocolate and sprinkle it with crushed candy canes. Essentially yes, but the the trick to it all is in its tempering. When we melt chocolate to a higher temperature all the molecules in it separate. When you temper the chocolate it allows the molecules to bond again, creating a shiny finish and a good strong snap when broken. Untempered chocolate is dull and soft, and will need to be refrigerated to maintain firmness. All it requires to achieve success is a good chocolate thermometer and a watchful eye.

Its also important to note that like most baking or cooking, the quality and taste of the finished product is only as good as the quality of your ingredients. Given that this recipe is all about the chocolate, I encourage you to splurge a little for optimum results.

Makes: 1 full cookie sheet, which you'll break into loads of pieces

200g dark chocolate , finely chopped

You will need: 1 cookie sheet lined with parchment, a chocolate thermometer

200g white chocolate, finely chopped

In the bowl of a double boiler, or in a heatproof bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water, place two-thirds of the dark chocolate (make sure the bottom of the bowl doesn't touch the water). Allow the chocolate to melt until the thermometer reaches 115 degrees.

1 generous handful of crushed candy cane

Remove from the heat and wipe the steam from the bottom of the bowl to avoid getting any drips of water in the chocolate (this would cause the chocolate to seize up and ruin it). Stir the chocolate with a spoon or spatula until the temperature drops to 95-100 degrees. Add the remaining one-third dark chocolate and continue to stir until it has melted. If the additional chocolate doesn't fully melt you can pop the pot back over the simmering water but only for a moment. You don't want the temperature to rise above 95 degrees or the chocolate will fall out of temper.

Use a plastic bench scraper or spatula to spread the dark chocolate across the prepared cookie sheet. Set aside.

Repeat steps 1 through 3 with the white chocolate and then carefully spread it across the dark chocolate layer.

Sprinkle the top of the white chocolate with the crushed candy cane. Set the tray aside for 1 to 2 hours, until the bark has fully set.

Once the bark has hardened, use your hands to break it into random pieces.