

PURE BLISS



TREAT YOUR SENSES TO THE PLEASURES OF CHOCOLATE

BY AMANDA FLATTEN

It is said that chocolate is an aphrodisiac and stimulates the pleasure centers of the brain. No wonder chocolate is synonymous with romance and the celebration of love on Valentine's Day. "Chocolate relaxes you and makes you feel euphoric," says Pat Eudarc-Amiri, owner of Chocolate Secrets & Wine Gardens on Oak Lawn Ave.



Originally from the Virgin Islands, Amiri enjoys the slow pace of the island lifestyle. Five years ago, after a 20-year law career in Dallas, Amiri created a space offering chocolate and wine pairings. “It’s a space with no pressure, no stress, just bliss,” she says. “We are always running to the next appointment and the next deadline. We never stop for a moment to take a breath, smell things and find a little moment of bliss, and that is really what the store is about.”

With truffles, chocolate bars, cake, mouse, drinking chocolate, crepes and fondue, the store offers all things chocolate, not to mention wine, custom jewelry, hand-blown glass and artwork by local artists. You can purchase prepackaged chocolate gifts or come into the store and enjoy chocolates from around the world at your leisure. You can even take part in complimentary conversational French lessons from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. every Wednesday and live jazz on Saturdays from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m.

Amiri says pairing chocolate and wine completely changes the experience. “A chocolate and wine pairing occurs on the palate, and you find tastes and flavors in each that enhance both,” she adds. “You want to match the intensity of chocolate to wine, so match dark chocolate with a more robust wine.”



Chocolate Covered Strawberries

4 cups strawberries

One 16-ounce bag bittersweet Schokingag baking chocolate or a bag of semisweet or bittersweet Nestle Toll House morsels

I love to make Chocolate Covered Strawberries. It's always a little messy when you make them at home with your children or your Valentine, but it's a wonderful excuse to smear each other with chocolate.

Use chocolate chips or break your bricks into small pieces. Place the chocolate in a bowl and set over a saucepan of simmering water. Make sure to stir the chocolate occasionally. It should all be melted in about 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from heat. It is easier to dip strawberries that have their stems intact. If yours are stem free, use kabob sticks. Place your dipped strawberries on waxed paper and let them set.

Ice Cream with Chocolate Sauce and Roasted Pecans

CHOCOLATE SAUCE

Serves 7

2 1/2 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped into 1/4-inch pieces
 6 1/2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
 1/3 cup granulated sugar
 1/4 teaspoon instant coffee granules
 1 cup hot water
 1/3 cup dark corn syrup
 2 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

ROASTED PECANS

Serves 12

1 egg white
 1 tablespoon water
 1 pound pecan halves
 1 cup white sugar
 3/4 teaspoon salt
 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Buy some good ice cream: It's better to use plain vanilla or strawberry ice cream because the flavor of the chocolate sauce and the pecans can be appreciated more fully.

You can buy chocolate sauce from Chocolate Secrets, or use Martha Stewart's recipe to make your own chocolate sauce. Combine chocolate, cocoa, sugar and coffee granules in a food processor. Process until finely ground, about 1 minute. Stir together water and corn syrup in a small saucepan; bring just to a boil over medium-high heat. With the food processor running, add the syrup mixture, then vanilla. Continue processing until the sauce is smooth, scraping down the sides as needed. (The sauce will seem thin, but will thicken during cooling.) Transfer to a container and refrigerate until chilled, at least 2 hours. Stir well before serving; if the sauce seems too thick, stir in a little water.

For the roasted pecans: You can go the easy route or go all out. The easiest way is to toast pecans in the oven or in a saucepan for just a few minutes. If you want to go all out: Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Grease one baking sheet. In a mixing bowl, whip together the egg white and water until frothy. In a separate bowl, mix together sugar, salt and cinnamon. Add pecans to egg whites, stir to coat the nuts evenly. Remove the nuts, and toss them in the sugar mixture until coated. Spread the nuts out on the prepared baking sheet. Bake for 1 hour at 250 degrees. Stir every 15 minutes.

Combine ice cream, chocolate sauce and pecans together and enjoy yourself. Use special dessert glasses or combine everything in a big bowl and pass out spoons to the kids.

After dinner, couples often come into the store to enjoy truffles and a glass of wine or the chocolate cake for two. Chocolate Secrets' Valentine's Day party is a celebration all its own and includes champagne, chocolate dipped strawberries, truffles, a rose and live jazz (reservations required).

Amiri says you can make Valentine's Day special for your children by making something together, such as Ice Cream with Chocolate Sauce and Roasted Pecans (see recipe on Page 54). Or create a little romance for your significant other with Chocolate Covered Strawberries and French Crepes (see recipes on Pages 53 and 54). And no matter what chocolate treat you make, take a moment to really savor it.

All recipes from **Chocolate Secrets & Wine Gardens**,
 3926 Oak Lawn Ave., Dallas, TX, 214.252.9801,
www.chocolatesecrets.net.

French Crepes

Serves 4

1 cup all-purpose flour
 3 eggs, beaten
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 1/4 cup sugar (optional)
 3 tablespoons of unsalted butter
 Pinch of salt
 1 cup of whole milk

Filling options: Bananas (half a banana, sliced), strawberries (two sweet strawberries, sliced), lemon juice (couple of drops), brown sugar (just a pinch), 1 teaspoon Gianduja (Hazelnut Chocolate liqueur)

Crepes should be served the way they are on the streets of Paris. Just keep it simple, use fine ingredients and eat them with good friends. Melt the butter in your crepe pan or 8-inch nonstick skillet. Mix/blend first seven ingredients, and pour ingredients into the melted butter. Heat your crepe pan or skillet. Do not allow it to start smoking. Pour about 2 tablespoons of batter onto your crepe pan or skillet. Immediately begin to swirl and tilt or spread your batter in an effort to create a thin, even layer. Cook until crepe is golden around edges and dry in center. This should only take about 30 to 45 seconds. The successive crepes will cook even faster. Flip your crepe carefully and cook on the other side until golden, about 15 seconds more. Make all your crepes at the same time if you'd like and just stack them as you cook.

Now have fun filling your crepes. I like to fold mine, but you also can roll them. Try the following combinations for filling: 1) bananas, lemon and sugar; 2) bananas and Gianduja liqueur; 3) strawberries, bananas and Gianduja; 4) brown sugar and butter (beurre-sucre); 5) pecans; and 6) vanilla ice cream.