

The Sensory Tasting Ritual



Background

Flavour is something that we experience with more than just our mouths; it's a journey we go on with all our senses. As much as 90% of what we taste is derived from our nose but the other 10% comes from a symphony of all of our other senses.

The Tasting Stick

The Tasting Stick takes us on that adventure of the senses, accentuating the way our senses work together to deliver the depth and complexity of the flavours and tastes that we enjoy so much.

Why use a Sensory Stick?

From the tapered end and the fractured line to the thicker cocoa pod, each element of the Stick accentuates a destination for our senses. This chocolate has been made especially to give us the maximum sensory experience.

Once you have learned how to taste chocolate properly, you'll encounter an ever-increasing range of amazing flavours and textures. Many of them may be an expedition into previously uncharted territory for you.

Less is more

Using this method of experiencing chocolate, you'll find that you shouldn't need to eat much chocolate to feel satisfied. A couple of squares of good chocolate, slowly savoured, should be enough to satisfy any chocolate cravings. Good high cocoa content chocolate packs a high-antioxidant punch, so it not only tastes good, but has many other well documented health benefits too.

Look

Before we do anything, as with wine we should read the label or the notes. •Where is it from?

- What cocoa content and type?
- What are the ingredients?
- Is it in date
- What are the ethical credentials?

Look at the tapered smooth end of the stick. Chocolate has a fantastic range of shades that most of us don't even realise are there.

The colour can vary between dark violets and rustic reds. The violet or red hues depend on the variety of bean used. The higher the percentage of cocoa, the darker the chocolate, but be aware this is not always a sign of quality and it is a myth that darker chocolate is always better chocolate.

Then look at the appearance of the surface - is it glossy, shiny, dull, mottled, waxy, discoloured? Is there any white film like substance on the top of the chocolate? (This is called bloom or crystallization). Does the edge have an even colour and fine grain, or is it coarse or crumbly? Smooth chocolate with a clean silky shine is an indication of skilful processing and storage.

Touch

Good chocolate will begin to melt at around 25°C and melts in the mouth without being chewed. The cocoa butter in chocolate is liquid at 36°C, our normal body temperature is 37°C Rub the tapered end of the stick it should just begin to melt to the warmth of your finger (you should feel it yield to your touch). The texture of chocolate can be smooth, or it can be grainy or gritty. It can feel velvety or creamy, or it can be waxy or greasy

Waxy chocolate is often an indicator that a cheaper vegetable fat has been substituted for the cocoa butter It should always feel dry It should feel silky, not sticky, waxy or gritty and not bloomed This will tell you if it has been stored properly.



Listen

Chocolate experts gauge the quality of chocolate by its “snap”. This is the clear, crisp sound made by breaking a piece of chocolate from a bar this snap sound demonstrates that the crystals have been lined up correctly. (tempered) A good, clean snap is a sign of high cocoa content and well-tempered chocolate



The snap should be neat, without crumbling, not too soft or too brittle.

Take your tasting stick and listen while you break it along the fracture line - it should snap crisply and cleanly. Milk chocolate (which has lower levels of cocoa solids), and white chocolate (which contains no cocoa solids), are both softer than dark chocolate. Therefore, by their nature they won't produce the same pronounced snap as dark chocolate.

Smell

The aromas in chocolate vary greatly; the different varieties carry individual aromas, characteristics and flavours. The aromas found in chocolate are almost identical to those found in wine. So why haven't we noticed them before? Well, that's probably because we're too busy indulging in the chocolatey journey or we're eating chocolate that has been overpowered by sugar. Chocolate has up to 1,500 distinct flavour compounds that combine to produce many aromas and flavours.



Rub the centre patterned area of the stick to melt it slightly, this will help to release the aromas, cup your hands round the chocolate and smell. As you start to recognise the aromas, ask yourself, is the aroma lingering and intense or faint and fleeting? Is it Rich? Sweet? Earthy? Nutty? Is it floral, fruity? Can you smell dairy, caramel or malt, toasted nuts, coffee, dried fruit or hints of tropical fruit, wine, or wood? Even if you don't find any of these, take your time to enjoy the aroma. Exercise your sense of smell and you will find that practice makes perfect. And with chocolate, practice is rather good fun!

Taste

Taste Chocolate contains layers of taste that only emerge when we take the time to notice them and allow the flavours to influence our taste buds before we experience our chocolate. There are four phases of taste:



Phase 1 - Taste on the tongue

Now place a small piece of the thicker cocoa pod end of the tasting stick on your tongue and close your mouth and pinch your nose, most importantly, don't chew! You can bite it to help it melt a little, but the key to getting the most from your chocolate is to let it melt slowly on your tongue, you will mainly taste sweet at this stage.

Phase 2 - Sense the aromas

Now release the nose allowing a burst of aroma, gently breath in through your mouth and out through your nose, most taste buds are on the front of the tongue, which is where you should start tasting the chocolate. It should be smooth and buttery, gently dissolving into a creamy liquid filling the mouth and nose with its complexity of aromas.

Phase 3 - Discover the flavours

Continue to allow the chocolate to melt slowly on the tongue. Be aware of how the chocolate feels in your mouth, its texture (smooth, gritty, fatty) The five basic flavours on our tasting journey are: acidity, bitterness, sweetness, astringency and umami (meaty).

Some chocolates only have a few identifiable flavour notes, but fine chocolate can take you on a real journey. It might be fruity, floral, earthy or spicy, but the chances are the flavours you pick up will evolve as the chocolate melts. Notice how the flavours develop and change in the mouth and nose as time passes. The more practised you are at tasting chocolate, the more you'll find you're able to recognise many more distinct flavours such as; cherries, jasmine, green bananas, oak, balsamic vinegar, liquorice.

Phase 4 - Experience the Finish

Remember, nothing is wrong; everyone's palate is different. Occasionally, really good chocolate flavours can linger for up to 45 minutes. In this case, you should allow the flavour to linger at least for several minutes. Afterwards you should be left with a clean aftertaste with no lingering sweetness and no residue.

Journey's end

Once you have tried this method of tasting chocolate, you will begin experiencing chocolate in a completely different way. It will lift your chocolate eating experience to a completely new level and you will begin to experience what fine chocolate is really about.

Enjoy your travels

Tips

Always taste the lowest percentage cocoa chocolates first.

If you are tasting flavoured chocolate, save the strongest flavours until last. For example, taste nutty or orange chocolate before chilli, mint or coffee flavours.

For the best results have all the chocolate at room temperature 18°C

Basic Aroma wheel

