

So much for last month's staving healthy and drinking beer.

# BEER and Chocolate

## It's Valentine's Day somewhere

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**IT SEEMS THAT FLAVORFUL CRAFT BEER WANTS IT ALL:** It continues to steal market share from the big guys, and grabs evermore attention in the press and public eye. Good beer positions itself as superior to wine and other drinks in pairing with fine food, and is embraced by foodies as both a cheaper and sometimes better choice. That's why we paired beer with a longtime wine companion, cheese, in Beer issue # 6, claiming the union superior to the grape. Now we go for the coups de grace—wedding beer to chocolate. Here's how.

# Chocolate 101

Chocolate begins with the cacao tree, a small (up to 25 ft.) evergreen that thrives in the tropical climates of Mexico and Central and South America. The tree needs humidity and lots of rainfall and grows best underneath the shade of other trees. In the proper setting, it produces fruit in the form of large pods that weigh up to one pound. Inside the pods are 20–60 cacao seeds or “beans” within a milky pulp. The beans themselves contain fat (cocoa butter), as well as their most active chemical, theobromine, which is similar to caffeine.

The history of chocolate inevitably points to Mesoamerican people like the Aztec and Mayas. The word “chocolate” itself may have been derived from the language of the Aztecs. Evidence suggests chocolate was being consumed by Mayans around 500 BCE, but jars in Oaxaca, Mexico, dating back to 1100 BCE contain a chocolate residue consumed by an even older civilization. These ancient people drank chocolate, often in an alcoholic form, more often than they ate it. The drink was not hot cocoa though, as it was bitter and often flavored with spices like vanilla, chili peppers and annatto.

Of course, it has to be collected first. When the cacao tree's fruit pods are fully ripe they are harvested. They are split open



and the milky white mixture containing the seeds (beans) is left to ferment for a couple days (the pods must be ripe or there will not be enough sugars in the mixture for the fermentation to complete). It is this fermentation that gives the beans their chocolate flavor. After fermentation, the beans must be dried quickly to prevent molding. Then the beans are roasted and cracked so the cocoa nib inside can be collected. It is the cocoa nib that is ground and liquefied to produce cocoa butter and solids.

Chocolate can then be produced with

this “cocoa liquor,” which refers to the cocoa butter/solids mixture. Good dark chocolate usually contains at least 70 percent cocoa content (solids and butter), usually listed on the package. Milk chocolate is sweeter and contains much less cocoa content, sometimes around 7 percent but up to 50 percent. (White chocolate usually does not contain any cocoa solids and is not really chocolate.) To produce these varying types of chocolate, sugar, butter, milk and vanilla are added to the cocoa liquor in different quantities.

This is how you cheat girls into liking beer. Pair it with chocolate!



## Chocolate is for (Beer) Lovers

**W**hen thinking about pairing beer and chocolate perhaps the first idea is to match dark roasty beers with dark chocolate. While this is an easy, natural choice, it is also a good one. But as we saw with cheese, creativity and imagination can result in some other wonderful flavor combinations.

Fred Bueltmann, managing partner of New Holland Brewing, often talks about flavor bridges between beer and chocolate. A particular flavor in the chocolate—for example, a 61 percent cacao Venezuelan chocolate made with ginger pulp—might act as a bridge to the dry, beet sugar-produced flavor in a Belgian trippel. Another way of looking at the bridge idea is to say that the flavors do one of a few things: complement, cleanse, contrast or create.

# Your Chocolate is in My Beer

Some beers not only pair well with chocolate, but include chocolate as an ingredient. Here are just a few examples. *Availability varies.*

**YOUNG'S DOUBLE CHOCOLATE STOUT:** From a traditional English brewery, this beer is made with real, dark chocolate.

**TYRANENA IMPERIAL OATMEAL PORTER (WITH COCOA NIBS):** Small but excellent Wisconsin brewery strikes gold again with this complex and wonderful experimental beer brewed with cocoa nibs.

**SOUTHERN TIER CHOKLAT IMPERIAL STOUT:** Made with bittersweet Belgian chocolate, this beer is smooth, creamy, sweet, and has a rich mouthfeel.

**OMMEGANG CHOCOLATE INDULGENCE STOUT:**

Ommegang uses Belgian dark chocolate and dark malts to make a beer that is somewhat sweet, has cocoa flavors, and includes a subtle fruitiness from Belgian yeast.

**DOG FISH HEAD THEOBROMA:** One of their historical/experimental beers, this is made with Aztec cocoa powder and cocoa nibs, honey, chilies, and annatto (fragrant tree seeds) to result in a beer that is mostly sweet like a Braggot with a subtle heat from the chilies.

**GREAT DIVIDE CHOCOLATE OAK AGED YETI:**

The brewery's description says it best: "cocoa nibs contribute some pleasing bitterness, while vanilla notes from the oak combine with the cocoa to create an aroma and flavor akin to a gourmet chocolate bar. A dash of cayenne keeps things lively, adding just a bit of heat to the finish."

**FOOTHILLS SEXUAL CHOCOLATE:** This cocoa-infused imperial stout is said to have notes of espresso, blackstrap molasses, dark toffee, and dark fruit.

Sometimes flavors might complement each other, like a sweet milk stout paired with coconut-infused chocolate. Some flavors might cleanse another flavor, like a sweet Belgian golden ale scrubbing away the dry flavor of a high-cocoa-content dark chocolate. Contrasting flavors are the pairings perhaps the most obvious and easy to seek out, like a chocolate made with chili powder paired with a smoked porter, or a coffee imperial stout paired with a chocolate with dark cherry notes. Ideally when a pairing works you create something new, something greater than the individual flavors.

Ray Daniels, beer author and spokesperson for the American Homebrewers Association, gives slightly more concrete examples of possible pairings by describing three groupings of beer and chocolate.

The first group is the obvious one: the dark beers such as stouts and porters that pair well with most any chocolate. These beers have roasted, toasted, and coffee-like flavors that go well with either sweet or bitter flavors of the chocolate.

A second group of pairings begins to move into more creative territory by looking at beers that have fruity and spicy flavors (wheat beers, Belgian ales) like clove, banana, even apricot or peach. Some chocolates may actually be made with some of these elements or purposely include those kinds of flavors. You might even mix and match spice flavors. For example, pumpkin beers often have cinnamon, nutmeg or ginger in them that may go well with certain kinds of chocolates.

Daniels saves perhaps the least obvious for last when talking about maltier beers such as Kölsch, Helles, or possibly Maibock. These less-intense beers may be paired successfully with lesser intense chocolates, maybe even cookies or brownies. And while that may not sound appetizing to some, the point is clear: the options are only as limited as your creativity. There are endless ways to approach this: looking for flavor bridges that complement or contrast, or just focusing on certain groups of beers as a starting point.



# Pairing Examples

Here are some pairings from my own tastings. Some pairings were tolerable, others mildly objectionable, and some worked exceptionally well. Reading the descriptions should give you some ideas about where to start.

**PAIRING:**

Founders Breakfast Stout with Rogue Chocolatier (Minneapolis, MN) Hispaniola (70 percent).



**VERDICT:**

Worked— This fine beer has flavors of coffee, an acrid roast from the dark malts, the slickness of oats and a subtle warmth from the alcohol. The chocolate's strong bittersweet fruity flavors of orange and cherry are a nice bridge to the bitter flavors of the beer.

**PAIRING:**

New Glarus Belgian Red with Green & Black's Organic Espresso (min 67 percent)



**VERDICT:**

Worked— This beer is remarkable in its intense cherry aroma and sweet fruit flavor. The chocolate's bitter coffee flavors contrast well with the strong cherry sweetness of the beer, kind of like coffee and pie.

**PAIRING:**

Homebrew imperial Rauchbier with Celeste truffle made with chili powder.



**VERDICT:**

Worked Just like a chipotle pepper, the smoke flavor goes well with heat. The chili powder in the truffle was pretty subtle and for this purpose could have been slightly greater, but still the pairing succeeded.

**PAIRING:** New Glarus Belgian Red with Rogue Chocolatier Hispaniola (70 percent).



**VERDICT:**

Did not work Often, contrasting rather than similar flavors work best, and this is a great example why. The chocolate has naturally strong cherry flavors as a result of the drying and production process. These are similar to the potent cherry quality of the beer and the effect of combining them is somewhat offensive to the palate, kind of like orange juice and candy. On their own, each is exceptional, but they do not work well together.

**PAIRING:** St Bernardus Abt 12 with Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory fudge.



**VERDICT:**

Worked, somewhat strangely This is a good example of something that works in an unexpected way. Both the higher carbonation of this Belgian strong dark ale and the zip of the Belgian yeast work to scrub the fat of the fudge off the tongue (much like in beer and cheese pairings), and cleanse the palate of the fudge's lingering sweetness.

**PAIRING:** Rogue Hazelnut Brown Nectar with Chocolates by Celeste (St. Paul, MN) truffle made with Frangelico (hazelnut liqueur)

**VERDICT:** Meh— Neither the beer nor the chocolate had any noticeable hazelnut character and while both were enjoyable, together they did not create a better taste experience. Maybe the hazelnut flavors cancelled each other out our none of the tasters had taste buds. We do know that Rogue's Hazelnut Brown should have a very light and pleasant hazelnut flavor, but it is a delicate one that could be cancelled easily.

**PAIRING:** Southern Tier Choklat Imperial Stout with Green & Black's Organic Espresso (min 67 percent)

**VERDICT:**

Works The beer is thick and ends with an overall impression of dark, roasty sweetness. The bitter coffee and dark chocolate flavor of the chocolate is a wonderful complement. The beer is brewed with chocolate and it also goes great with it.

# Final Thoughts

All of this highfalutin' talk is little more than lipstick on a pig. At the end of the day, they are just words on paper and do not mean anything compared to the flavors you taste in your mouth. As we said with cheese, if a pairing works for you, then it works. You have read enough to give you ideas to start your chocolate and beer adventure. Remember, it's Valentine's Day somewhere. ☺

Is that guy eating something or smoking something... What kind of party is this?

Beer really pairs with everything..