

February



Six Things You Didn't Know About Chocolate

It was a “classy” drink. Cacao beans were used by the Aztecs to prepare a hot, frothy beverage with stimulant and restorative properties. Chocolate was reserved for warriors, nobility, and priests.



It makes you happy. We know what you're thinking: “Of course chocolate makes you happy - it's so good!” But there's scientific evidence to back up those light-hearted feelings. Like other palatable sweet foods, consumption of chocolate triggers the release of endorphins, the body's endogenous opiates. Enhanced endorphin-release reduces the chocolate-eater's sensitivity to pain and contributes to the warm inner glow induced in susceptible chocoholics.

It'll help you live longer. Two of the world's longest-living people - Jeanne Calment (122 years old) and Sarah Knauss (119 years old) - were considered chocoholics by today's standards. In fact, Calment habitually ate two pounds of chocolate per week before her doctor instructed her to give up sweets.

Chocolate is complex. More than 300 different constituent compounds in chocolate have been identified. Eating large amounts may give you an energy boost. Chocolate contains caffeine, but the caffeine is present only in modest quantities. It is easily obtained from other sources. Indeed a whole ounce of milk chocolate contains no more caffeine than a typical cup of “decaffeinated” coffee.

It decreases stress. Chocolate also contains tryptophan. Tryptophan is an essential amino acid. It is the rate-limiting step in the production of the mood-modulating neurotransmitter serotonin. Enhanced serotonin function typically diminishes anxiety.

A Sweet Treat for Your Sweetie!

Ingredients

- 1 (18.5 ounce) package devil's food cake mix
- 1 (5.9 ounce) package instant chocolate pudding mix
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 4 eggs
- ½ cup warm water
- 2 cups semisweet chocolate chips



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C.)
2. In a large bowl, mix together the cake and pudding mixes, sour cream, oil, beaten eggs and water. Stir in the chocolate chips and pour batter into a well-greased 12 cup bundt pan.
3. Bake for 50 to 55 minutes or until top is springy to the touch and a wooden toothpick inserted comes out clean. Cool cake thoroughly in pan at least an hour and a half before inverting onto a plate. If desired, dust the cake with powdered sugar.

Source: <http://allrecipes.com/>

Source: <http://www.chocolate.org/>



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5 Easy Ways to Improve Your Home on a Budget



Does your home deserve a little TLC but the idea of an “extreme home makeover” makes you want to cringe? Don’t fret over a few fixer-uppers. Here are five DIY projects that’ll spiff up those sore spots without breaking the bank.

Create an Accent Wall: Go from blah to beautiful with just a paint can or wall paper. An accent wall adds also instant depth to a room that might otherwise appear flat.

Paint the Garage Door: When it comes to around-the-house DIY projects, painting a garage door may not immediately come to mind. But easy updates like this one make a big impression in the eyes of buyers - and maybe even your neighbors.

Add a Splash of Color to your Front Door: You’ve heard the saying “first impressions are the most important.” The same is true for your home. Color doesn’t work on every home, but for some it can add an instant “pop” of color immediately adding character and personality.

“Green” Your Home: There are many benefits to bringing plant life into your home. Not only do they purify your air, they add instant “life” to any room. Find easy-to-maintain plants that don’t dry out easily in an air-conditioned environment.

Fix the Floors: Floors reveal a lot about the condition of a home. As long as they aren’t in very poor condition, a quick sand and stain on a hardwood floor or carpet cleaning can bring back that “new home” feeling in only days.

Accessorize: Your homes is a statement of YOU - take the time to add home decor that speaks to your own personal style. Buying accessories doesn’t have to be expensive either. Look for stores to put products on sale, or for estate sales in your area. Consignment and wholesales stores are also popular places to find great value on a wide variety of home decor.

Clear out the Clutter: Nothing makes a home feel like new more than organizing all that you’ve amassed over time. Take a weekend (or two, depending on how much you’ve let pile up) to clean out closets, drawers, extra bedrooms and attics. You’ll be amazed at how free you and your home feel after the great clean out of 2013.



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