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### Not just desserts

Explore the unexpected marriage of chocolate and chilies.

Wednesday, February 08, 2006

**By Jewels Quelly**  
**The Express-Times**

In the 2000 movie, "Chocolat," Juliette Binoche's character, Viane, opens a chocolate shop in a small French village. Of Mayan descent, Viane begins enchanting the villagers with her wild custom-confected chocolate creations.

As legend of the chocolate's magic spell spreads, one by one, the townspeople make their way to her shop. Moviegoers witness the rapture as the chocolate is consumed by the characters and then the surprise as the chocolate bites the characters back.

It's all about the incredibly rich marriage between chilies and chocolate. The richness and decadence of chocolate should not be confined to a box of paper-nestled confections. Pair some chocolate and chilies in all their forms, fresh, dried, whole or ground for some new taste sensations.

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Mole is a classical Mexican dish. Literally translated, mole means mixture, so you may see the word in many titles of recipes whose sauces differ. In a traditional, basic mole, unsweetened chocolate is the magic ingredient. Since the chocolate is unsweetened, the absence of sugar will encourage the chocolate to leach bitter flavors into your dish, so splurge for the high-quality stuff. Scharffen Berger chocolate is recommended.

Be prepared for a deep, rich sauce, enhanced by the cinnamon. If the unsweetened chocolate version doesn't suit your taste, then using bittersweet chocolate might be the answer, especially if high-quality chocolate is not available.

The following recipe is for the quicker version of mole. If spicy heat is an issue for you, seed the chipotles before adding them. You may omit the peanut butter, if desired. It is included to round out the flavors of the sauce and lend some additional smoothness. An alternative to simmering the dish on the stove for 20 minutes would be to braise the dish on low in a slow cooker for about 3 hours, which will really impart the sauce's flavors to the chicken. Leftovers, if there are any, are delicious as enchilada stuffing.

**Chicken Mole**

6 skinless boneless chicken thighs, each cut into 3 pieces

2 Tablespoons ground cumin

1 Tablespoon olive oil

1 large onion, thinly sliced

2 (14½-ounce) cans chili-style chunky tomatoes in juice

1 cup canned low-salt chicken broth

2 Tablespoons peanut butter

¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

2 tablespoons minced canned chipotle chilies in adobo sauce plus 1  
tablespoon adobo sauce

1 ounce unsweetened chocolate, chopped

Coat chicken on all sides with cumin. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.

Heat oil in heavy large pot over medium-high heat. Add chicken; sauté until browned on all sides, about 5 minutes. Add onion and sauté until beginning to brown, about 3 minutes. Add tomatoes with juice, broth, chipotle chilies, adobo sauce, and chocolate and bring to simmer. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until chicken is cooked through and sauce thickens slightly, about 20 minutes. Season with salt and pepper; serve.

Makes 4 servings.

**Source: Adapted from [epicurious.com](http://www.epicurious.com).**

The key to the next recipe is to grind your own chilies, if possible. chipotles lend a subtle hint of spice along with a rich smokiness. ancho chilies are also flavorful, yet mild. A small coffee/spice grinder can be purchased for \$10 to



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\$15 and offers a world of possibilities, not just with hot peppers, but also with many other spices, too. Do not use traditional chili powder, as it is usually a blend of dried peppers and other spices such as cumin, onion powder and garlic, ingredients that when mixed in dessert is pushing the envelope a little too far.

**Chocolate Chile Bites**

2 sticks butter

7 ounces good-quality dark chocolate

1¼ cup sugar

5 eggs

1 rounded Tablespoon all-purpose flour

1½ teaspoon ground chilies (adjust to your taste and to the strength of your chilies)

**Pre-heat your oven to 400 degrees. Grease mini muffin pans. You may need to clean and re-grease the pans in between batches, depending on how many pans you have.**

Melt butter with chocolate in a small saucepan or in a bowl in the microwave. If melting in the microwave, be sure to do it slowly, blending with a spoon between each pass.

Transfer into a mixing bowl, add in the sugar, mix with a wooden spoon and let cool a little. Add the eggs one by one, mixing well with the spoon after each addition. Add a rounded tablespoon of flour and the chili powder and mix well.

Pour the dough in the mini muffin pans then bake for 10 to 12 minutes. The top should look set, but the inside should still be on the soft side.

Let mini bites cool down enough to unmold them then turn them out on a rack to cool completely while you cook the other batches. Store in a plastic container, refrigerate, and take out about an hour prior to serving the next day.

Makes 72 mini bites.

**Source: Adapted from [chocolateandzucchini.com](http://chocolateandzucchini.com)**

Holy Moley Chili

**3 Tablespoons vegetable oil**

3 medium onions, chopped

1 Tablespoon chili powder

1 Tablespoon ground cumin

¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

2 medium green bell peppers, chopped

3 cloves garlic; chopped fine

3 Tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder

1 can (28-oz) tomatoes (undrained), chopped

1 cup water

1 can (14 ounces) red kidney beans, drained and rinsed

1 can (14 ounces) black beans, drained and rinsed

2 cups fresh or frozen whole kernel corn

½ cup bulgur

Salt and pepper

Plain low-fat yogurt

Chopped fresh cilantro

**In large heavy saucepan, heat oil over medium heat. Add onions, chili powder, cumin and cayenne pepper; sauté for 5 minutes or until onions are tender, stirring occasionally. Add green peppers and garlic; sauté for 1 minute. Add cocoa, tomatoes and water; bring to a boil. Add kidney and black beans, corn and bulgur. Reduce heat to low and simmer, uncovered, for 15 minutes or until bulgur is cooked. Add salt and pepper to taste.**

To serve, top with a dollop of yogurt and sprinkle with cilantro.

Makes 6 servings.

**Source:** [cdkitchen.com](http://cdkitchen.com)

Bry's Chocolate Lamb Chili

**1 medium onion, chopped**

1 pound lean ground lamb

2 Tablespoons olive oil

½ teaspoon red pepper flakes

½ tablespoon dried basil

1 teaspoon cumin

teaspoon cinnamon

2 large cloves garlic, minced

3½ tablespoons chili powder

½ teaspoon dried oregano

1 teaspoon unsweetened cocoa powder

- 1 teaspoon white sugar
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 (14.5 ounce) can diced tomatoes with juice
- 4 cups red beans, with liquid

**In a large pot, cook onions and ground lamb in olive oil over medium heat.**

When onions are soft and meat browned, season with red pepper flakes, basil, cumin, cinnamon, garlic, chili powder, dried oregano, cocoa powder, sugar, and bay leaf, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook for 1 or 2 minutes. Stir in tomatoes and beans. Increase heat to bring soup to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer for 15 minutes.

Makes 6 servings.

**Source: allrecipes.com**

Jewels Quelly, of Washington, is a graduate of The Culinary Institute of America. She is the Chef/Owner of AngelFood Personal Chef Service and Catering Company (angelfoodpcs.com), which serves Warren and Hunterdon counties and The Lehigh Valley. Readers can write to her at angels@goes.com.

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