



Chile-Infused Chocolate Caramels

makes about 250

**You can also double the recipe, making sure your pot is big enough (I like my 15-qt jam pot). To get the right consistency, I suggest you only cook it to about 242°.*

- 4 cups chile-infused heavy cream
- 2 1/2 cups light corn syrup
- 4 1/2 cups sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons instant espresso, dissolved in 2 tablespoons hot water
- 1/2 - 1 teaspoon ground cayenne, optional
- 1 pound plus 2 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped in small pieces
- 1/2 pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into 16 pieces
- vegetable-oil cooking spray
- textured sea salt, like Maldon or grey fleur de sel

CHILE-INFUSED CREAM

Pour 4 cups heavy cream into a large saucepan over medium heat. Crumble in 6-8 dried red chiles de árbol (you can substitute 2-3 heaping teaspoons dried red chile flakes) and gently simmer for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to sit, covered, for 2 hours or longer. Dip your finger in to test spiciness. You should feel a rather intense heat at the back of your throat. If not, allow to infuse longer. When it has reached desired spiciness, strain thoroughly, discard chiles, and set cream aside.

MAKING CARAMELS

Spray an 11 3/4-by-16 1/4-inch baking pan with vegetable-oil spray. Place in a level spot where it will not be disturbed.

In a heavy 4-quart saucepan, combine 2 cups cream, corn syrup, sugar, and salt. Clip on candy thermometer. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon, 15 to 20 minutes. Wash down sides of pan with a pastry brush dipped in water to remove any sugar crystals.

Cook, stirring constantly, until temperature reaches 220 degrees, 6 to 8 minutes; watch so mixture doesn't boil over. Continue stirring, and add chocolate and butter. Keep mixture boiling, and slowly add remaining 2 cups cream, instant espresso and cayenne, if using. Cook, still stirring, until temperature reaches 244 degrees (firm-ball stage), about 60 minutes, keeping mixture at a low boil.

Without scraping pot, pour mixture into prepared pan. After it has cooled slightly for about 15 minutes, sprinkle a thin layer of salt over the entire sheet, pressing very lightly to set salt into caramel. Let stand uncovered at room temperature for 24 hours without moving.

To cut, unmold caramel, salt side up, onto wooden cutting board. Using a large, sharp knife, cut into 1 1/4-by-3/4" pieces, or whatever shape you like. Wrap each piece in foiled or waxed paper. (Enlist helpful elves in this task!)