

Mom's Peppermint Hot Chocolate with Vanilla Whipped Cream

Prep and Cook Time: 20 min. | Serves 6-8
Inspired by Ina Garten, The Barefoot Contessa

Ingredients:

2 ½ cups whole milk	1 tsp. instant espresso powder or good instant coffee
2 cups half-and-half	1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
4 oz. bittersweet chocolate, chopped	1 tsp. Nielsen-Massey Pure Peppermint Extract* (optional)
4 oz. semisweet chocolate, chopped	10 candy canes or peppermint candy sticks, divided
2 tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder, such as Valrhona, Lindt, Callebaut or Ghiradelli*	Sweetened Whipped Cream (recipe follows)
1 tbsp. sugar	

Directions:

Heat the milk and half-and-half in a large saucepan over medium heat to just below simmering. Off the heat, add the bittersweet and semisweet chocolates and whisk until the chocolates melt. Whisk in the cocoa powder, sugar, and vanilla, reheat over low heat, and pour into cups or mugs.

Meanwhile, place four of the candy canes in a plastic bag and crush them with a rolling pin. Stir ½ tablespoon of the crushed candy canes into each cup, top with a generous dollop of whipped cream, and sprinkle the whipped cream with more crushed candy cane (recipe below). Add a whole candy cane stirrer into each mug and serve hot.

Sweetened Whipped Cream

(Makes enough for 6 mugs of hot chocolate)

1 ½ cups cold heavy cream
¼ cup sugar
1 ½ tsp. pure vanilla extract

Place the cream, sugar, and vanilla in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Whisk on medium-high speed only until the cream makes soft peaks. If you over-whip it, you can add more cream and whip it again until it makes soft peaks.

Notes: The better the chocolate and cocoa powder, the better the taste. If you can't find any of the chocolates in your grocery store, they are available online at Amazon or others, such as www.kingarthurbaking.com. Hershey's now makes a nice Dark Chocolate Cocoa Powder. Nielsen-Massey Peppermint Extract can usually be found at Williams-Sonoma, Sur la Table, or in some specialty grocery stores.