

SALTED CHOCOLATE CARAMELS

Prepared in 45 minutes or less plus 3 hours to cool.

- 2 cups heavy cream
- 10 ½ oz fine-quality bittersweet chocolate (approximately 60% cacao)
- 1¾ cup sugar
- ½ cup light corn syrup
- ¼ cup water
- ¼ tsp salt
- 3 Tbs unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 2 tsp flaky sea salt such as *La Baleine* or *Maldon*
- Vegetable oil for greasing pan



Parchment paper and a candy thermometer are needed.

Line bottom and sides of an 8-inch straight-sided square metal baking pan with 2 long sheets of crisscrossed parchment. Bring cream just to a boil in a 1 to 1½-quart heavy saucepan over moderately high heat, then reduce heat to low and add chocolate. Let stand 1 minute, then stir until chocolate is completely melted. Remove from heat.

Bring sugar, corn syrup, water, and salt to a boil in a 5- to 6-quart heavy pot over moderate heat, stirring until sugar is dissolved. Boil, uncovered, without stirring but gently swirling pan occasionally, until sugar is deep golden, about 10 minutes. Tilt pan and carefully pour in chocolate mixture (mixture will bubble and steam vigorously).

Continue to boil over moderate heat, stirring frequently, until mixture registers 255°F on thermometer, about 15 minutes. Add butter, stirring until completely melted, then immediately pour into lined baking pan (do not scrape any caramel clinging to bottom or side of saucepan).

Let caramel stand 10 minutes, then sprinkle evenly with sea salt. Cool completely in pan on a rack, about 2 hours.

Carefully invert caramel onto a clean, dry cutting board, then peel off parchment. Turn caramel salt side up. Lightly oil blade of a large heavy knife and cut into 1-inch squares. Yields 64 squares and can be kept for 2 weeks in an airtight container.

It's the sprinkle of sea salt that really takes these caramels over the top, teasing out the creamy richness of the buttery chocolate candies. If desired, additional sea salt can be pressed onto caramels.

Madagascar, off Africa's southeast coast, grows a prized Bourbon-Madagascar vanilla bean that has a very rich and particularly sweet flavor. With this very special ingredient, these cupcakes become heavenly and are "to-die-for."