

Chocolat!

Rich, dark, and smooth this hot chocolate is subtly uplifted with a hint of vanilla and the spice of ground chile. (Do not use chili powder—the mix of spices with cumin and oregano. Use pure ground red chile pepper like the rich pasilla, chile negro, or ancho.) The word chocolate comes from the Aztec and Mayan “xocoatl” which translates as bitter drink. These Indians who believed it gave them power and energy mixed it with chiles, vanilla and spices.

In the cafés in Europe, hot chocolate is usually prepared with melted chocolate rather than cocoa, and served with a dollop of whipped cream on top. Here, experience the best of both worlds. Try just 1/4 teaspoon of chile and then taste—and add more if desired—I like it with about 1/2 to 1 teaspoon (depending on the heat of the chiles) so it warms the tongue.

Serves 2

2 cups half-and-half cream, 1 cup whipping cream + 1 cup milk or 2 cups milk
2 to 3 tablespoons organic sugar or maple syrup
2 ounces semi-sweet or bittersweet chocolate, cut into pieces
2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract or 1/4 teaspoon vanilla bean paste
1 or 2 large pinches mace
1/4 to 1 teaspoon ground ancho or pasilla chile powder

In a heavy-bottomed non-reactive saucepan, combine the cream, sugar, chocolate pieces, and cocoa powder. Place over medium heat and stir with a whisk. Keep stirring with a whisk until the sugar is dissolved and the chocolate is melted; do not allow the hot chocolate to boil.

Turn the heat to low and whisk so there is some froth on top. Remove from heat and stir in the vanilla, mace, and ground chile powder, let sit a minute or two. Whisk, taste for chile seasoning; adjust to taste. Serve hot with whipped cream if desired.

The chocolate can be cooled and refrigerated and reheated the next day.