

Chocolatier & Chocolate Shop Checklists

Goods-In · Opening · Ambient Temperature & Humidity · Tempering, Bloom & Shelf Life · Allergens, Claims & Weighing · Closing

Goods-In & Receiving

Chocolate is more often damaged before it arrives than spoiled on your shelf. Only accept stock that traveled cool, at a steady temperature, and with the correct label.

ACCEPT ONLY STOCK THAT ARRIVED IN GOOD CONDITION

- ☐ **Before you sign, check how the load traveled. Look at the truck's temperature, how much sun it got, and how long it sat on the dock.**
Heat during transport causes bloom, and you already paid for that chocolate. 30°C (86°F) storage damaged every chocolate product tested.
- ☐ **Open one case from each pallet. Check for grey bloom, melt lines, fingerprints, dull shine and misshapen shells.**
One opened case tells you if the whole delivery can be sold at full price. Reject it at the door, while it is still the supplier's loss.
- ☐ **Check filled and soft-center lines on their own. Make sure seals are unbroken, nothing is leaking, and date codes are there and easy to read.**
The water is in the center, not the shell. A broken seal on a ganache or caramel line is a spoilage risk that a solid bar never has.
- ☐ **Check every label against the supplier's spec sheet. Look for milk, nuts, soy, sesame, gluten, and any 'dairy-free', 'vegan' or 'free-from' claim.**
One testing program found that 12.2% of candy and chocolate products had an allergen the label did not list. Catching this at the door is the cheapest way to catch it.

SET STOCK UP SO YOU CAN ROTATE IT, SELL IT, AND TRACE IT

- ☐ **Write down the best-before date and lot code for every line as it comes in. Log filled and solid lines separately.**
Lot codes let you pull one batch instead of your whole counter if a recall happens mid-season.
- ☐ **Before you accept a packed line, weigh a sample of it against the quantity printed on the label.**
The moment you sell it, the packer's short measure becomes your problem. About 6% of businesses inspected for correct measure were found breaking the rules.
- ☐ **Put new stock behind existing stock (oldest stock first, or FIFO). Put seasonal stock in its own dated, labeled area.**
Seasonal lines lose value the day after the date. Keep them separate so they never quietly take the place of your everyday par.

Opening - Set Up to Sell

Find out what happened to your stock overnight, sort out any damage, then fill the counter and gift stand before the first customer sees a gap.

FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED OVERNIGHT

- ☐ **Before you touch any stock, read and write down the overnight temperature and humidity in every storage and display area.**
Bloom is caused by ups and downs, not by one high point. The overnight reading is half of that cycle, and you never see it otherwise.
- ☐ **Do a bloom scan. Walk through the display and back stock and look for grey haze, dull shine, sugar crust and soft edges.**
Under bad conditions, color change shows up within 10 to 20 days. A two-minute scan every day catches it in one case, before it spreads across the counter.
- ☐ **Before the doors open, pull and sort anything bloomed, melted or misshapen. Melt it down for baking use, discount it, or write it off.**
Recover the value while you still have options. A bloomed piece on display at full price costs you the sale, and the customer's next visit.

SET UP TO SELL

- ☐ **Fill the counter, shelf and gift stand to 100%. Put filled lines and lines closer to their date at the front.**
A full display sells more than one that looks picked over. Putting short-dated stock at the front is how you sell it before it becomes waste.
- ☐ **Put bestsellers, gift boxes and current-season lines at eye level and closest to the register.**
Chocolate makes up 51.7% of confectionery sales, and most of it is bought on impulse. Where you place it is the cheapest big change you can make.
- ☐ **Move every display out of direct sunlight and away from doorways, ovens, spotlights and heat vents.**
A shelf in the sun goes through its own daily heat cycle. That is the same 20°C to 29°C (68°F to 84°F) swing that caused intense bloom within 55 days.

BUSY SEASON, AND YESTERDAY'S NUMBERS

- ☐ **During a Big Four season, set up and price the seasonal display first, before the everyday counter.**
In the US market, four seasons bring in 63% of yearly confectionery sales. Wherever you trade, your own busy periods work the same way. In those weeks, the seasonal stand is the shop.
- ☐ **Review yesterday's waste, bloom write-offs and sell-outs. Adjust how much you fill today, up or down, to match.**
Every wasted bar costs more than it used to. Cocoa prices hit a 46-year high, and retail chocolate prices ran 17% higher than two years earlier.

HYGIENE & SAFETY

- ☐ **Wash your hands and put on clean gloves before you touch any chocolate or stock.**
Dirty hands can carry bacteria and allergens onto food that people eat.
- ☐ **Ask staff if they feel sick before the shift starts.**
Send home anyone with vomiting, diarrhea, or a fever. Sick staff can spread illness through food they touch.
- ☐ **Mix sanitizer to the correct strength (ppm) and check it with a test strip.**
Weak sanitizer will not kill germs. Strong sanitizer can contaminate the chocolate it touches.
- ☐ **Warm up the tempering machine and check it reaches the right temperature before the first batch.**
A machine that is not warm enough makes chocolate that will not set or shine right.
- ☐ **Set out a separate scoop, tong, or spatula for each nut and non-nut line before you open.**
Shared tools carry nut traces into products that must stay nut-free.
- ☐ **Walk the production and storage area and look for pest droppings, gnaw marks, or live pests.**
Catching pests early stops a small problem from becoming a health inspection failure.

Ambient Storage - Temperature & Humidity

Chocolate does not spoil, it slowly gets worse. Hold one steady range, take humidity as seriously as temperature, and stop every source of temperature swings.

MEASURE THE ROOM, NOT THE WEATHER

- ☐ **Log the room temperature and humidity three times a day in every storage room, back-of-house area and display area.**
Humidity causes half of what makes chocolate bloom, and almost nobody measures it. That is exactly why it keeps costing you stock.
- ☐ **Use a min/max thermometer-humidity gauge or data logger in each area. Do not use the wall dial or a weather app.**
A single reading misses the swing between checks, and that swing is what causes the damage.
- ☐ **Log each area on its own. The stockroom, counter, window display and gift stand are four different climates.**
An average for the whole shop hides the one sunny shelf that is quietly turning your bestseller grey.

STOP THE TEMPERATURE SWINGS

- ☐ **Never put finished display chocolate in the fridge. If you must use cold storage, keep it sealed and let it warm back up to room temperature in its wrapper.**
Published guidance is clear that the fridge is not the ideal place for chocolate. Going in and out of the cold is what blooms the surface.
- ☐ **Above 20°C (68°F): move the stock or shade it, write down the time, and tell the manager.**
In an 18-week trial, visible fat bloom began at 20°C. This is a level that calls for action, not just a comfort choice.
- ☐ **Above 65% humidity: dry the air out or move the stock. Treat 75% humidity as a proven failure, not just a warning.**
At 75% humidity with daily temperature swings, milk chocolate reached a Whiteness Index change of 7.9, and a mixed-fat dark sample reached a color change (ΔE) of 23.63, within 55 days.

PROTECT THE STOCK YOU ALREADY OWN

- ☐ **Do a weekly bloom check. Inspect the oldest case in every area for haze, dull shine and softening, and write down what you find.**
Bloom builds up over time. The oldest case is your early warning for everything stored behind it.
- ☐ **Record every out-of-range excursion. Note how long it lasted, the reading, and which stock was exposed to it.**
One hot afternoon rarely shows in your stock. Ten of them do. The excursion log is what proves which area is costing you product.

Tempering, Bloom & Shelf Life

Snap and shine come from one crystal form. Prove the temper on every batch, catch bloom while it is still one case, and treat filled pieces as a different product from solid ones.

TEMPER TO FORM V - AND PROVE IT EVERY BATCH

- ☐ **Run a temper test on every batch before molding or coating. Dip a knife or strip, let it set for 5 minutes, and check for even shine with no streaks or soft patches.**
Being out of temper is not just about looks. It means the wrong crystal form, and the wrong crystal form blooms on the shelf instead of in the kitchen.
- ☐ **For each batch, log the seed and working temperatures for your couverture against the supplier's spec sheet.**
Every couverture has its own numbers. The only target that is always the same is Form V, which melts at 33.8°C (92.8°F).
- ☐ **Set and cool finished work in a steady area. Do not use a fridge, a drafty spot, or a spot next to an oven.**
Cooling too fast or a draft can drop the product into unstable crystal forms that melt at temperatures as low as 17.3°C (63.1°F).

CATCH BLOOM WHILE IT IS STILL ONE CASE

- ☐ **Check snap and shine on the first piece of every batch, and on the oldest piece in every area each week.**
Snap and shine tell you directly whether the chocolate is in Form V. Losing them is the first sign the stock is turning into Form VI.
- ☐ **Write down which kind of bloom you found: fat bloom (a greasy grey film, caused by heat) or sugar bloom (gritty crystals, caused by damp).**
The two kinds have different causes and different fixes. Logging which one it is tells you whether to fix the temperature or the humidity.
- ☐ **Follow the bloom steps in order: melt it down for baking and mix-ins, then discount it, then write it off. Never put it back on display at full price.**
Bloomed chocolate is safe to eat but cannot be sold as a gift. Recover the value of the ingredients instead of losing the customer.

FILLED AND SOLID ARE TWO DIFFERENT PRODUCTS

- ☐ **Date and rotate filled, soft-center and fresh-cream lines on their own, with a shorter shelf life than solid lines.**
Solid chocolate is far below the level where germs can grow. A ganache, caramel or fruit center is where the water is, so that is where the risk is.
- ☐ **If you make your own centers, control and record the water activity level. Hold your recipe's target, and never go above 0.85.**
The FDA treats a water activity level of 0.85 as the safe cutoff for germ growth, and yeasts and molds can grow below it too. So 0.85 is the highest limit, not the target to aim for.
- ☐ **Sell filled pieces first. Put them at the front of the counter, take them out of the case first, and be first to lower their price.**
The stock with the shortest life has to sell the fastest. Nothing filled should ever be the oldest thing in the shop.

Allergens, Claims & Weighing

Nuts and milk are the two allergens this business sells the most. Every hand-packed box also carries a legal weight promise. Both need to be checked at the counter.

NUT AND MILK CROSS-CONTACT

- ☐ **Use one scoop, tong or spatula for each pick-and-mix bin and each loose line. Never share tools between nut and non-nut products.**
Shared serving tools are the cross-contact route in loose confectionery. Hazelnut, almond, and peanut all showed up in survey test results.
- ☐ **Do a full, written clean-down between milk and dark chocolate runs, and between nut and nut-free runs, on every shared line, mold, table and tool.**
Switching between products is where undeclared milk gets into dark chocolate. It is also where one chocolate plant's cleaning failure led to an outbreak across 12 countries.
- ☐ **Keep an up-to-date allergen chart at the counter for every loose, repacked and made-in-house line. Read it, never rely on memory.**
Undeclared allergens made up 47.3% of all reportable-food entries in one FDA registry year. Guessing at the counter is how you end up part of that number.

CLAIMS YOU CAN ACTUALLY PROVE

- ☐ **Never call or label dark chocolate dairy-free, vegan or milk-free unless you have a current supplier spec sheet or test result.**
The FDA found milk in 2 of 13 dark chocolates labeled dairy-free or lactose-free, and in 1 of 4 labeled vegan. A regulator recalled 36 'dairy free' dark chocolates in one survey.

- ☐ **List the allergens and ingredients again on anything you repack from bulk into gift boxes, hampers or loose bags.**
Repacked assortments are the hardest lines to label correctly. Labeling mistakes make up 27% of EU confectionery notifications.
- ☐ **Check the label on every seasonal assortment before it goes on sale. Check allergens, ingredients, net quantity and date.**
In a Valentine's-season survey, 10 of 345 products had undeclared allergens or gluten, and two were recalled.

WEIGHT IS MONEY, AND IT IS LAW

- ☐ **Before any hand-packed box, bag or assortment leaves, weigh it against the quantity printed on it.**
A 100 g gift box has about 4.5 g of legal room for error. Guessing the weight by eye either gets you fined or gives away your profit.
- ☐ **Check counter and packing scales every day against a known test weight. Keep them level, clean, and within their calibration date.**
A scale that has drifted out of accuracy mis-prices every sale until someone checks it. Short measure is regularly inspected, and regularly fined.
- ☐ **Reject any pack that is short by more than twice the tolerable negative error. Keep the batch average at or above the stated weight.**
These are the EU/UK average-quantity packing rules: average at the stated weight, no more than 2.5% of packs short beyond the tolerable negative error, and none short by twice that error. US operators follow NIST Handbook 133 maximum allowable variations instead.

Closing - Capture, Reorder & Protect

Record the numbers that fix tomorrow and the next busy season. Then leave the stock overnight in conditions you can prove.

RECORD THE NUMBERS

- ☐ **Log waste by reason: bloom, melt, damage, or out-of-date. Also log it by filled compared with solid.**
No published data says how much chocolate is written off because of bloom or heat. The only way to get that number is to log it yourself.
- ☐ **Log every sell-out by line, and the hour each one ran out.**
The hour it ran out tells you whether your par is set wrong, or the delivery is late.
- ☐ **During a Big Four season, log daily seasonal sell-through against the days left in the season.**
63% of the year's US confectionery sales happen in four windows, and your own market's busy periods work the same way. You get one chance to read each one while you can still act on it.

SET UP TOMORROW AND THE NEXT BUSY SEASON

- ☐ **Reorder any line that is at or below par, before the supplier's cutoff time.**
A stockout on a gift line during a busy week is the most expensive kind of empty shelf you can have.
- ☐ **Follow the season countdown: put seasonal stock out at least six weeks before the date, and start cutting prices the morning after the date.**
49% of US Halloween shoppers started buying in September or earlier. Six weeks is a default based on that, not a published standard. Stock that arrives late misses the buyers, then sits at full price.
- ☐ **After any supplier price change, work out the new cost and check that pack size, price and profit margin still work.**
Cocoa cost has risen sharply while confectionery sales volumes fell 5%. Prices that are not kept up to date quietly eat your whole profit margin.

PROTECT STOCK OVERNIGHT

- ☐ **Take and log the final room temperature and humidity reading. Set heating, cooling or a dehumidifier to hold the range overnight.**
The overnight half of the swing is the half nobody controls, and it is that swing that blooms chocolate.
- ☐ **Reseal filled lines and opened boxes. Close blinds and covers over any display that catches morning sun.**
A display in the sun starts warming up before anyone opens the door. Filled centers need the seal that solid bars do not.
- ☐ **Check the cash matches your sales, and secure high-value gift and seasonal stock.**
Small, high-value stock placed for impulse buys is the kind that goes missing most. Across all retail, the average loss runs 1.6% of sales (this is an all-retail average, not a confectionery figure).

SANITIZING & CLOSE-DOWN SAFETY

- ☐ **Wash, rinse, and sanitize the tempering machine, molds, enrober, depositor, and dipping tools at close.**
Chocolate left on equipment overnight holds bacteria and draws pests.
- ☐ **Empty the tempering machine completely and switch it off before you leave.**
Chocolate left inside the machine overnight can seize or spoil.
- ☐ **Mix fresh sanitizer to the correct strength (ppm) and wipe down every prep surface and worktable.**
A sanitizer batch used all day loses strength and stops killing germs.

Weekly Checks

These checks run once a week, not every day.

FULL PEST INSPECTION

- ☐ **Do a full pest inspection of the whole production and storage area once a week.**
Look in corners, behind equipment, and under shelving. A quick daily glance can miss a slow entry point.
 - ☐ **Check every pest trap and bait station, and record what you find, once a week.**
Regular trap checks catch a growing problem before it becomes an infestation.
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THERMOMETER & PROBE CALIBRATION

- ☐ **Calibrate every thermometer and probe used in storage, display, and production, once a week.**
A thermometer that has drifted can hide a real temperature problem.
 - ☐ **Write down the calibration result and the date for each thermometer and probe.**
A record proves your temperature readings can be trusted.
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DEEP-CLEAN & SANITIZE EQUIPMENT

- ☐ **Take apart and deep-clean the tempering machine, molds, enrober, depositor, and dipping tools once a week.**
Daily wiping does not remove chocolate that builds up in seams and joints.
 - ☐ **Sanitize every part after the deep clean and let it air dry before you reassemble it.**
A wet reassembly can trap moisture and cause sugar bloom in the next batch.
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