Chocolate caramels (with a secret ingredient!) – GF,DF,EF, plant-based

Who doesn't like gooey-centred chocolates (does a person like this even exist?!)? I enjoyed caramels coated in crisp chocolate back in the day. They have a texture and taste that has long been out of my treats vocabulary though due to my food intolerances! So, how have I remedied this and what is my secret ingredient to do so?! Dates!! Recently, after a gentle and slow reintroduction, I have been loving small amounts of medjool dates. They are so delicious and gooey…and taste like caramel!

I was given some cacao butter at Christmas and it dawned on me – why not try making a dark chocolate and dip medjool dates in it? Oh how I'm glad I did! They seriously feel and taste like chocolate caramels. And as an awesome addition, there are so many healthy bonuses in this treat!

Because cacao butter is raw, it retains its nutrients and

enzymes more so than what typically ends up in the chocolates we buy at the shops, which means you get antioxidants, healthy fats, and benefits such as youthful skin, assistance with mood, improved immunity, decreased inflammation, and it even improves metabolism and digestion!

Raw cacao powder comes about when the bean is ground and the fat content is removed. It does have similar health benefits to cacao butter, and has features such as high magnesium levels, and even has more calcium than cow's milk, which is pretty great!

Dates are also packed with important nutrients, minerals and antioxidants that can assist in preventing illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's. They can decrease inflammation and help with bone health. There have even been studies that show they can decrease labor time if eaten in the last few weeks of pregnancy! Being a dried fruit, dates do have a high fructose content, which means you shouldn't overeat them, whether you have fructose malabsorption or not. However, they are so sweet that you really do not need to eat much in one sitting to be satisfied.

Even maple syrup has bonuses such as riboflavin, zinc, magnesium, calcium and potassium. It is a sugar so moderation needs to be put into practice (and it can be left out of this recipe), but it is considered better than white sugar.

So, need I go on?! What's stopping you?…make these healthy treats, which are super simple to make, asap!

Ingredients

10 medjool dates
1/2 cup cacao (or cocoa) powder
1 cup chopped cocao butter
1 tsp vanilla extract
2 tablespoons maple syrup (optional)
Pinch of salt (optional)

Method

1. Place a sheet of baking paper on a large flat tray or plate
2. Remove the pits from the dates.
3. Make the dates the size you desire; e.g. leave them whole or cut them into halves or thirds
4. In a medium saucepan, bring water (about 5 centimetres deep) to the boil. Place a medium sized bowl on top, ensuring the water does not touch the bottom of the glass bowl
5. Add the cocao butter to the bowl, stirring gently until it melts
6. Pour in the maple syrup and combine
7. Remove the bowl from the heat and add the cacao powder, vanilla extract and salt and mix until well combined and smooth
8. Place a date into the chocolate and dip until it is well covered. Scoop it out with a small fork, steadying it with another small fork, gently shake off any excess chocolate, and place it on the tray or plate. Continue with all the dates. Stir the chocolate mixture from time to time so that it remains well combined and smooth
9. Put the chocolate covered dates into the fridge, ensuring the tray remains straight
10. When the chocolate is set, remove from the fridge and repeat step 8 (you can skip this step if you prefer a thin layer of chocolate)
11. Return to the fridge until set
12. Store the dates in an airtight container in the fridge or freezer

*The dates are very sweet so you may decide to not add maple syrup.
*You could use dried Deglet Noor dates, which are cheaper and have less sugar. They are firmer and not as gooey or sweet as medjool dates. You could try soaking them for an hour or two

and draining off the excess water before dipping them into the chocolate.

I hope you enjoy this recipe!

Happy date-dunking!