

Homemade Chocolate Cherries

By Marilyn Reeves

For years my son Tom and I would gift each other with a box of Brach's chocolate covered cherries for the Holidays. You had to hold it over your plate when you bit into one because the syrup would ooze out of the middle and run down your chin and all over your fingers. And they were so rich and delicious, I could only eat one (or maybe two).

But for some reason, I haven't been able to find them at the store the past few years. Perhaps Brach's went out of business, or I'm just looking in the wrong store, but I miss them. So for the last few years I have attempted to make my own to put into my goody bags at Christmas time.

It is no simple task, however. It is time consuming and makes an icky-sticky mess, but the results are worth the effort none-the-less.

First you need to purchase a large jar of maraschino cherries, a package of semi-sweet chocolate chip minis and a bag of powdered sugar.

When you're ready to begin, you place the cherries in a strainer to drain off the excess liquid. Then you mix the powdered sugar with butter, a dash of vanilla and a little milk, to the consistency of pie dough. You take a little glob of dough, flatten it out in the palm of your hand and attempt to wrap it around a squishy, juicy cherry, pinching off the excess dough and tossing it back in the bowl. This sounds easier than it is, because after every half dozen or so, the dough gets stickier and stickier from the cherry juice, so you have to keep adding powdered sugar and remixing the now pink dough to the right consistency.

The wrapped cherries need to be placed in rows in a wax-paper-lined container – the flatter the better, because the containers are going to take up half the room in your freezer. When you're finally done wrapping all five dozen cherries and have placed them in their covered containers in the aforementioned freezer, you are free to get on with your day. Or, if you're like me, you can spend the next half hour cleaning up the mess you've made and then go take a nice, long winter's nap. Up to you.

A couple of days before you're ready to serve your luscious goodies, you melt the chocolate chips with some shortening for the coating. Be prepared to make an even bigger mess, because you're going to plunge each sugar-dough-coated cherry (still chilled from the freezer) into the chocolate and then try to fish it back out again with a spoon and place it on still more waxed paper. (If you're smart, you will have purchased the cherries with their stems intact, but I'm not, so I didn't.) After about an hour's worth of frustration, your entire kitchen and your clothes spattered with chocolate, you then place the chocolate-cherries in the refrigerator to 'ripen' before serving (except for the ones that you sampled along the way, but those don't count).

The results are pretty darn good, if I do say so, but it would be so much simpler if I could just find those darn boxes of Brach's. Then the only mess I'd have to clean up would be my sticky chin and fingers after eating one. Or maybe two ... at a time, that is.