

CHOCOLATE RATIOS

Wondering which chocolate to buy? Some semisweet/bittersweet chocolate bars come labeled with percentages that reveal the proportion of cacao (pure chocolate) to sugar. On average, semisweet/bittersweet contains 50 to 55 percent cacao to sugar. Chocolate with a higher cacao percentage looks darker and tastes less sweet and more chocolatey. Keep in mind that ratios above 70 percent can give different results in recipes. These chocolates may cause a cake to be dry and, predictably, less sweet. Experiment to see what you like best. For a good reference on cooking with these chocolates, we recommend Alice Medrich's *Bittersweet*.

POWDERS

(On brown paper, above right)
From dark to light: unsweetened cocoa powder, Dutch-process unsweetened cocoa and powdered vanilla. Dutch-process is regular cocoa treated with alkali to neutralize its acidity and give it a mellow taste. Use either cocoa in recipes calling for unsweetened cocoa powder.

SWEET VANILLA

Spiced vanilla sugar (above) and plain vanilla sugar with specks of vanilla bean (in cupcake wrapper) wake up your cinnamon toast or oatmeal with flavor. They add a vanilla finish to butter cookies or shortbread, too. To buy vanilla products from Midwest purveyors, visit spicehouse.com, penzeys.com or nielsenmassey.com.

Nielsen-Massey Vanillas of Waukegan, Illinois, suggests these substitutions in its book *A Century of Flavor*: 1 vanilla bean = 1 tablespoon vanilla bean paste (made from vanilla bean seeds and extract) = 1 tablespoon vanilla extract = 1 tablespoon vanilla powder. ■