

Homemade Chocolate Italian Ice

Faith Kramer, Sugar Savvy & Blog Appetit - It was hot, muggy and steamy on the streets of New York during my recent visit. How did I keep my cool and enjoy a treat without suffering a chocolate meltdown? Why, I just indulged in a refreshing chocolate Italian ice. Italian ices are well known on the East Coast, especially in the Mid-Atlantic states. They are smoother than granitas, softer than sorbets and just generally different. They are also incredibly refreshing.

While I ate Italian ices throughout my youth and as an adult on periodic visits back East, I really didn't know much about them. I did a quick web search on the history and differences but I have to say I was left a bit confused about the difference between an Italian ice and an Italian water ice. Some sources use both terms interchangeably, others say there is a difference. An Italian ice is flavored, then frozen and shaved for serving. An Italian water ice is plain ice that is flavored after it has been shaved into soft, snowy mounds, except when it is not and then it is the same as an Italian ice. Regional differences among Italian immigrants and American cities probably account for the differences in technique and nomenclature.

Italian immigrants to this county brought with them a long tradition of frozen desserts including granita (made by freezing water, fruit juices or other flavoring ingredients and sugar in a pan and periodically flaking and scraping the ice as it forms to break up the ice crystals) and sorbet (made by freezing similar ingredients in a ice cream freezer). Commercial Italian ice makers proudly list their flavors made from natural fruit and other flavors. Lemon and cherry are traditional flavors but modern tastes range from melon to mango, chocolate to green tea. What they don't list is how they make their treat. Food historians say it started as frozen blocks of sweetened fruit flavors shaved into small, white pleated paper cups. As the ice melted, eaters could squeeze the cup to get the last of their ice. While the pleated cup is still the traditional method of serving Italian ice, nowadays more and more vendors are serving the treat in sturdier disposable bowls with spoons.

My chocolate ice was delicious, with a clean, dark chocolate taste. Although it was made without any milk products it was incredibly rich but without being heavy. It was the perfect summertime treat.

Here is a recipe for a chocolate ice I adapted from a cookbook I picked up in a used bookstore. The Complete Book of Homemade Ice Cream by Carolyn Anderson was published in 1972. (The book is no longer in print but used copies are available on the web in the U.S., Canada and the U.K). It isn't an "authentic" chocolate Italian ice recipe, but it is close, especially if you serve it before hardening it in the freezer. Chocolate Ice yields 1/2 gallon

2 cups sugar
5 cups water
1 cup cocoa
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Boil the sugar and water together for five minutes and then remove from heat. Immediately add the cocoa and cinnamon. Mix well. Let it cool a bit and then refrigerate until cold.

Freeze in an ice cream freezer as per manufacturer's instructions. Serve straight from the ice cream maker container for a softer ice or place in the freezer for a few hours to harden the ice. Another option is to pour the chilled chocolate ice mixture into ice cube trays and freeze. Before serving, process ice cubes in small batches in a blender or food processor until chocolate ice mixture is thoroughly broken up but not yet slushy.

To make the best iced coffee ever, add a few of the Chocolate Ice ice cubes to your favorite cold java. Add in milk and sugar to taste and top with whipped cream and a drizzle of chocolate syrup.