



Chocolate Caramel Apple Owls

Level: Easy
Makes: 6

Prep & Decorating Time: 1.5 hours
Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Cool Time: 4 hours

6 medium granny smith apples
6 wooden apple sticks or sturdy treat sticks

Caramel:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
1 cup light brown sugar, packed
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup light corn syrup
 $\frac{1}{2}$ (14 oz.) can sweetened condensed milk
2 tsp. pure vanilla extract

$\frac{3}{4}$ (1 lb. 14 oz.) bag dark chocolate melting wafers
(see Notes)

Royal Icing:

$7\frac{1}{2}$ cups confectioner's powdered sugar; sifted
6 Tbsp. meringue powder
12 Tbsp. warm water



Decorating ingredients:

Black food gel or paste (not liquid)
12 OREO cookies

42 Orange chocolate covered sunflower seeds (7 per owl)

To prepare the apples: Wash and dry the apples. Push the sticks into the stem or bottom of the apple (whichever side balances better when standing up). Place some boiling water in a deep, wide cup, and dip the apples completely into the boiling water for 20 to 30 seconds to remove any wax. Dry apple well with a paper towel and set aside.

To dip apples in caramel: Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Coat paper with butter. Set aside. In a small deep saucepan, melt the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter over medium high heat. Add the sugar, corn syrup, and condensed milk and stir until combined. Attach a candy thermometer to the inside of the saucepan and reduce the heat to medium. Stir the mixture continuously until the temperature reaches 235°F ("Soft Ball" stage). Turn off heat source, remove candy thermometer, and continue to stir for another minute. Add vanilla extract and stir to combine. Working quickly, dip the apples one by one, letting the excess caramel drip off. Place on the buttered parchment paper. (If the caramel hardens before you finish all the apples, reheat the caramel until it turns to dipping consistency.) Let the apples cool for 1 to 2 hours. When cooled, if desired, cut off excess caramel at the bottom of the apple with kitchen shears.

To dip in chocolate: Melt chocolate wafers according to instructions on package (I use a Wilton Chocolate Melting Pot). Dip the caramel covered apples in the melted chocolate, let the excess drip off and place apples back on parchment paper. Let the chocolate harden for 1 to 2 hours.

For Royal Icing (mix half a recipe at a time if using a small mixer): In a stand mixer with a whisk attachment, beat the powdered sugar, meringue powder, & water for about 8 to 10 minutes, until

smooth & the icing loses its sheen. (While beating, I like to cover the top of the mixer with a large piece of damp paper towel so it covers the top of the bowl & won't dry the icing.) Place icing in an airtight container until ready to decorate. (When exposed to air, the icing dries and hardens.)

To decorate the owls: Place $\frac{1}{4}$ of the white icing in a piping bag with Wilton Tip#12. Pipe circles onto 12 OREO cookies and set aside to harden. Place piping bag with white icing in an airtight container until needed later. Color the rest of the icing with black food gel. In a piping bag fitted with a coupler and Wilton Tip #22, vertically pipe the feathers of the owl with black/gray icing starting from the top of the apple to the bottom, going around the entire apple. Push 6 orange chocolate covered sunflower seeds into the bottom of the icing to create the owl's talons. Set aside to harden. Repeat with remaining apples. By using the coupler, change the Wilton Tip to #3. Pipe smaller black/gray circles and eyelashes onto the 12 OREO cookies to complete the owl's eyes. Set aside to harden. Take the piping bag with the white icing out of the airtight container. Pipe large circles onto the top part of the apple where you will be sticking the OREO cookie "eyes". Let icing dry for a few minutes before adhering the two OREO cookie "eyes" and 1 orange chocolate covered sunflower seed for the beak. Repeat with remaining apples. Set aside to dry and harden. When ready to eat, cut apples into fourths away from the center apple core.

Notes:

- I used Ghirardelli Chocolate Dark Melting Wafers, and bought the large 1 lb. 14 oz. bag at Sam's Club.
- If you want a simply decorated chocolate caramel apple, after dipping in chocolate, press apple into your topping of choice. In the picture in the background (left), I used Halloween colored sprinkles. Other options are: toasted nuts, cereal, marshmallows, crushed OREO cookies or graham crackers, etc.