

Red, White, and Blue Popcorn

Ingredients:

12 cups popped popcorn (from 1/2 cup popcorn kernels and 6 tablespoons vegetable oil)
2 cups sugar
2/3 cup whole milk or half and half
2 tablespoons corn syrup
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1 drop red (super red) gel food coloring, or enough drops liquid to get a nice red color
1 drop blue (royal blue) gel food coloring, or enough drops liquid to get a deep blue color

Directions: To pop the popcorn on the stovetop, in a large pot with a tight fitting lid, add the 6 tablespoons of vegetable oil and 2 kernels of the popcorn and heat over medium heat, uncovered. When the kernels pop, add the remaining 1/2 cup of kernels and fit the lid on the pot. Shake the pot on the stove to heat the kernels. Shake a few times and keep the kernels moving. When the kernels start popping keep the pan moving until the pops are about 2 seconds apart and slowing down (it will take a few minutes to get up to heat, but don't be tempted to turn the heat up or you'll scorch the kernels).

Remove the popcorn from the heat and divide into about 4 cups per bowl in 3 large bowls and set aside.

In a medium sized saucepan combine the sugar, milk or half and half, corn syrup and salt. Cook over medium heat until the sugar dissolves, then bring the mixture to a low boil until the temperature reaches 230 degrees F (soft ball stage – this is where if you drop a small drop of the sugar mixture into a very cold cup of water it should form a soft ball in the water that flattens out when it is out of the water. Don't rush this part of the process or turn your heat up and get impatient because you'll end up with caramel instead of a well cooked sugar syrup that you can color with the food coloring. Still tasty, but not what we're going for here. This part of the cooking process took a good 15 minutes for me on a barely medium flame (at high altitude).

Once your sugar syrup has reached the soft ball stage at 230 degrees, stir in the vanilla extract. It will bubble and hiss, and that's ok. Once it is all stirred in, pour 1/3 of the mixture into a small heat proof bowl. Add another 1/3 of the mixture from the pan into another heat proof bowl. Add the red food coloring to one of the bowls and the blue food coloring to the other bowl. Whisk the food coloring quickly and carefully into each bowl separately to get your colored syrups.

Working as quickly as possible so your syrup doesn't cool too much pour the colored sugar syrup each over one of the bowls of popcorn you separated earlier and use a rubber spatula to fold and stir the candy over the popcorn gently to coat. Repeat with the other two syrups in the other two bowls – if your syrup has cooled too much to pour, reheat it quickly in the microwave for a few seconds to make it more pourable, but not enough to bubble it – it should be about the consistency of corn syrup and still warm.

Spread the stirred and coated popcorn out onto a large piece of parchment to cool and dry for a few minutes. Toss the colors together (or line them up on a pan in stripes!) and serve.