

EATING & DRINKING

By GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

THIS TIME OF year, no one needs to be reminded that they like hot chocolate—that it's good, that it's the antidote to the cold and the general dreariness that can permeate life come deep winter. But as we drag ourselves into pandemic year two, small comforts have assumed outsize importance. What else explains the insane viral sensation of hot chocolate bombs from a few months ago? This winter, not only do we like hot chocolate; we need it.

It's an instant pick me up. It's a chocolate bar that does not need to be chewed, just poured down your throat, warming your esophagus, your belly and, ultimately, your soul. This soothing drink is exactly the kind of harmless sedative America needs right now, the ultimate expression of self-love—or, at least, self-mercy.

Hot chocolate bombs aside, this winter, even regular old drinking chocolate has been a hot commodity. Matthew Caputo, co-owner of A Priori Chocolate, a Utah-based importer and distributor of dozens of craft chocolate brands, said that sales of drinking chocolates have gone up at least five times from past winters, and manufacturers are having difficulty keeping up with demand. Mr. Caputo attributed it in part to all the outdoor gatherings and activities that have extended well beyond their usual season. When we're chilly, hot chocolate is what we crave.

It's practically programmed in our DNA. Long before humans were eating chocolate, we were drinking it. "If the history of chocolate were a 24-hour cycle, glossy chocolate bars and confections would represent a few seconds," writes chocolate and cacao scholar Maricel Presilla in "The Oxford Companion to



WHAT A MUG In just 15 minutes you can make this silky and soothing hot chocolate at home.

Cocoa-Dependent

Let the weather and the world do their worst. Made from scratch or from a packet, hot chocolate is always there for us.

Sugar and Sweets." "Cacao and chocolate beverages would account for the vast majority of a long saga that began in South America 56 centuries ago, at least 1,670 years before the Egyptians built their first step pyramid."

After all this time, the love affair with drinking

chocolate is going strong. In New York City, frigid temperatures and closed indoor dining did not deter customers from lining up outside the first U.S. location of Angelina, which opened last November, for a taste of the Parisian café's famously thick chocolat chaud. "We

see it all day long," said Anthony Battaglia, Angelina's chief operations officer. "We are selling up to 80 liters of hot chocolate a day. Our hot chocolate machine is working from 5 a.m. to 9 at night non-stop producing, producing, producing." Due to unexpectedly high sales, the

New York location had to send for reinforcements of branded disposable cups from the Paris mothership.

Nearby, at Rockefeller Center, a vintage Citroën van operated by the acclaimed restaurant Frenchette sprung up this winter to sell crêpes and steamy drinking choco-

late. Pastry chef Michelle Palazzo makes this one with semisweet Valrhona chocolate, milk and cream. She tops it with a toasted-to-order marshmallow flavored with Chartreuse, the herbaceous French liqueur, a flavor combination inspired by the classic après-ski pairing of hot chocolate and Chartreuse. In Brooklyn, pastry chef Fany Gerson, co-owner of the recently opened Fan-Fan Doughnuts, sells a thick and creamy Belgian-style hot chocolate made with both milk and dark chocolates. She adds a toasted marshmallow and a garnish of crunchy doughnut croutons that turn into something like bread-pudding once they soak in the hot chocolate—a reasonable reward after waiting in line in freezing temperatures to order doughnuts.

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But you don't have to brave the cold to experience excellent hot chocolate. There is an astounding variety of splurge-worthy mixes available to whip up at home in moments. (See "Manageable Mugfuls," below.) Or, make a top-notch rendition from scratch using just two ingredients—your favorite dark chocolate and milk. In his book "Drinking French," Paris-based pastry chef David Lebovitz offers a recipe as easy as it is luscious. "Any good chocolate that you like to eat would be good for hot chocolate," said Mr. Lebovitz, who was fixing himself a cup as we chatted on the phone, using Taza stone-ground Mexican chocolate and milk from the British emporium Marks & Spencer. "Drinking chocolate is from the tropics," he pointed out, "and we can all use a trip to somewhere else right now."

BUY IT

Manageable Mugfuls

Whether you're a fan of single-origin sipping chocolate or Swiss Miss-style cocoa, there's a stir-and-go option to suit your taste.



For the Dark-Chocolate Averse **Burdick Blend White Drinking Chocolate** (\$24, burdickchocolate.com) delivers cocoa-butter smoothness. **Burdick Blend Milk Drinking Chocolate** (\$24 at burdickchocolate.com) is a quality sipping chocolate with mellow character.



For Those Seeking Balance Try **Ritual Mid Mountain Blend Drinking Chocolate** (\$16, ritualchocolate.com) from Utah. The mixture of chocolates from Madagascar, Peru, Ecuador and Belize is supremely well-rounded, with a texture that mixes up velvety and smooth.



For Nutella Nuts **Gianduja Roasted Hazelnut Drinking Chocolate** (\$11, chefshop.com) from the Toronto chocolatier SOMA chocolatemaker is basically Nutella in hot chocolate form. And, like Nutella, it is thick enough to eat with a spoon.



For Lovers of Spice **Rózsavölgyi Csokoládé Paprika Hot Chocolate** (\$17, caputos.com) is a Hungarian chocolate flavored with Hungarian hot paprika, cinnamon and cloves from husband-and-wife chocolatiers Zsolt Szabad and Katalin Csiszár.



If You Wish to Dip Churros or Doughnuts Cacao beans roasted over oak wood, stone-ground and hand-shaped, **Xocolata Jolonch** (\$10, shop.littlespain.com) makes Spanish-style chocolate a la taza as dark as midnight and silky as pudding.



For Aficionados of Mexican Chocolate and Cuisine **Masienda Champurrado** (\$14, masienda.com), a nutty corn porridge flavored with cinnamon and Mexican chocolate sourced by Denver's Cultura Craft Chocolate, makes a marvelously warming breakfast drink.



For Swiss Miss Fans, **Momo Cocoa Instant Cocoa** (\$4, momococoa.com) is a nostalgia-inducing, much better version of the just-add water hot chocolate we remember, made with organic ingredients (mini marshmallows not included).



If Marshmallows Are Non-Negotiable The **Ginger Elizabeth Hot Chocolate Tin With Marshmallow Baton** (\$22, gingerelizabeth.com) comes with a 14-inch-long, fluffy, vanilla-flecked marshmallow—the perfect foil for the molten semi-sweet drinking chocolate.



For a Winning Cup An earthy, well-rounded hot chocolate that froths up beautifully, **Goodnow Farms Almendra Blanca Hot Cocoa** (\$17, goodnow-farms.com) won the very first drinking chocolate competition in the International Chocolate Awards last October.

MAKE IT

Chocolat Chaud (Hot Chocolate)

Total time 15 minutes
Makes 4 small servings

The secret to David Lebovitz's Parisian-style hot chocolate is whole milk and plenty of high-quality dark chocolate. The optional addition of raw or brown sugar lends a wonderful toasty toffee flavor. Mr. Lebovitz recommends making the drink a day or two in advance and storing it in the refrigerator, then rewarming it: The drink gets thicker the longer it sits. Serve it in small tea cups, the way the French do, as this intense hot chocolate packs a punch. To give the hot chocolate a nice frothy texture, zap it with an immersion blender for a few seconds before pouring it into your cup—a technique recommended by both chocolate/cacao scholar Maricel Presilla and Wonderbon Chocolate Co. co-owner Maury Rubin. It's a worthwhile extra step that gives the drink a light, airy mouthfeel, and it works well with packaged cocoas, too.

2 cups whole milk or neutral plant-based milk, such as Oatly Barista Edition
5 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped
1-2 tablespoons raw or light brown sugar (optional)
Whipped cream or marshmallows, for garnish (optional)

1. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, warm milk and chocolate, whisking occasionally until chocolate is melted.
2. Bring mixture almost to a boil, paying close attention. (If it comes to a full boil, it will quickly boil over.) Reduce heat to lowest setting and gently simmer hot chocolate, whisking constantly, 3 minutes. Remove pan from heat.
3. When chocolate is cool enough to sip, add sugar to taste, if using. To serve, pour hot chocolate into cups and top with whipped cream or marshmallows, if using.

—Adapted from "Drinking French" by David Lebovitz (Ten Speed Press)

SWITCH IT UP

Using this recipe as base, make it:

Spicy
Along with the milk and chocolate in step 1, add ½ teaspoon cardamom and 1 teaspoon cinnamon.

Boozy
Off heat at the end of step 2, stir

in ¼ cup Chartreuse or rum.

Nutty
At the end of step 2, add ½ cup chocolate-hazelnut spread and whisk until smooth.

Malted
At the end of step 2, add ½ cup malted milk pow-

der and whisk until smooth.

Extra-Caffeinated
At the end of step 2, whisk in 4 ounces of hot espresso.

Dessert-y
Pour ½ cup hot chocolate over a scoop of vanilla ice cream