

# haute chocolate

When the weather outside gets frightful, hot cocoa serves up a decadent cup of comfort. We tested dozens of mixes to find the best, from chocolatier concoctions to supermarket brands that taste pricier than they are.

**D**rinking chocolate began as a luxury: Two millennia before Swiss Miss, Mayan nobles invented the first cocoa-based cocktail, an elixir made of wine, roasted cacao beans, and chili peppers. When the bean crossed the Atlantic centuries later, the drink retained its aristocratic status in Spanish and French courts, where hot chocolate-and-wine recipes were closely guarded secrets; by the 1700s, the English had come up with the milky (nonalcoholic) version we relish today. Fortunately, by now hot chocolate has become a thoroughly democratized luxury, with varieties available for every palate and pocketbook. And while it's hard to have a *bad* cup of cocoa, some definitely rise above the rest. After assiduously taste-testing mug after mug of hot chocolate and cocoa (yes, there is a difference—turn the page), comparing for flavor, texture, and simple enjoyability, we've rounded up our favorites in three categories. Whether you crave a sweet everyday fix, a creamy warm-'em-up afternoon treat, or a rich wow-'em dessert drink, you'll find something that satisfies.

Louis XVIII chocolate pot,  
\$165, Pillivuyt, 125west.com.



**COCOA VS. CHOCOLATE**

Hot cocoa is made of chocolate powder minus the cocoa butter. Hot chocolate, which contains cocoa butter, is richer, thicker, and more expensive (try diluting it for children by adding more than the recommended amount of milk or water). We found that, in general, the cheaper the mix, the more sugary it was—but, of course, that's just how the kids in us prefer it.

**FESTIVE OCCASION**

**JACQUES TORRES CLASSIC HOT CHOCOLATE**

The Goldilocks pick: This master chocolatier's mix is just right—not too sweet or too bitter. Plus, you'll love scraping the little nibs of chocolate that never completely dissolve out of the bottom of the mug. \$18 for 18 ounces, [mrchocolate.com](http://mrchocolate.com).

**VOSGES LA PARISIENNE EXOTIC HOT CHOCOLATE**

Thick and syrupy, "like a just-melted candy bar," said one of our testers. This mix is so intense—especially when you follow the recipe on the box, which calls for heavy cream as well as milk—that you'll know right away why the suggested serving is less than half a cup. \$25 for 16 ounces, [vosgeschocolate.com](http://vosgeschocolate.com).

**MARIEBELLE AZTEC HOT CHOCOLATE**

Parental guidance suggested: This spicy drink, which includes small amounts of ground ancho chile and nutmeg, will blow away grown-ups. Kids, however, may want to stick to small sips—or to something more G-rated. \$17 for 10 ounces, [mariebelle.com](http://mariebelle.com).

**AFTER-SCHOOL SPECIAL**

**STARBUCKS CHOCOLATE COCOA MIX**

Kids especially clamor for this cocoa, which is deliciously milky and smooth (no clumps floating on top) without tasting artificial. As one tester commented, "Tastes like the kind Grandma used to make from scratch." \$7 for 6.25 ounces, [starbucks.com](http://starbucks.com) for store locations.

**SCHARFFEN BERGER SWEETENED COCOA POWDER**

Unlike most cocoas, whose beans are "Dutched" (which results in reduced harshness), this mix is made from fermented beans, resulting in a sophisticated, slightly bitter-sweet taste—which is good for those who find most cocoas cloying. \$8.50 for 8 ounces, [scharffenberger.com](http://scharffenberger.com).

**HOLY CHOCOLATE SWISS MILK CHOCOLATE COCOA**

A Silicon Valley priest named Reverend Stan whips up this small-batch brand, which got high marks for its creamy texture (it tastes like it has dissolved marshmallows in it)—even when made with water. \$12 for 12 ounces, [holychocolate.com](http://holychocolate.com).

**EVERYDAY FIX**

**HERSHEY'S GOODNIGHT KISSES COCOA**

Drink up without getting too hopped up—this cocoa, which contains tiny Hershey's Kisses, still has sugar but is 99.9 percent caffeine-free (most cocoas naturally have around five milligrams a cup, roughly a tenth the amount found in a cup of instant coffee). \$1.30 for 4 packets, at supermarkets nationwide.

**SWISS MISS CHOCOLATE SENSATION COCOA**

Our testers couldn't believe this was Swiss Miss. Improving on the ski-lodge classic, this variety is surprisingly dark, aromatic, and chocolaty. Parents might even be tempted to sneak a sip from their kids' mugs. \$2 for 8 packets, at supermarkets nationwide.

**GODIVA CLASSIC MILK CHOCOLATE HOT COCOA**

"Sweet!" declared one of our testers. Thankfully, though, the sugariness is nicely tempered by the quality chocolate, which provides depth. This mix also dissolves more completely than many others do. \$10 for 15.4 ounces, [godiva.com](http://godiva.com).



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