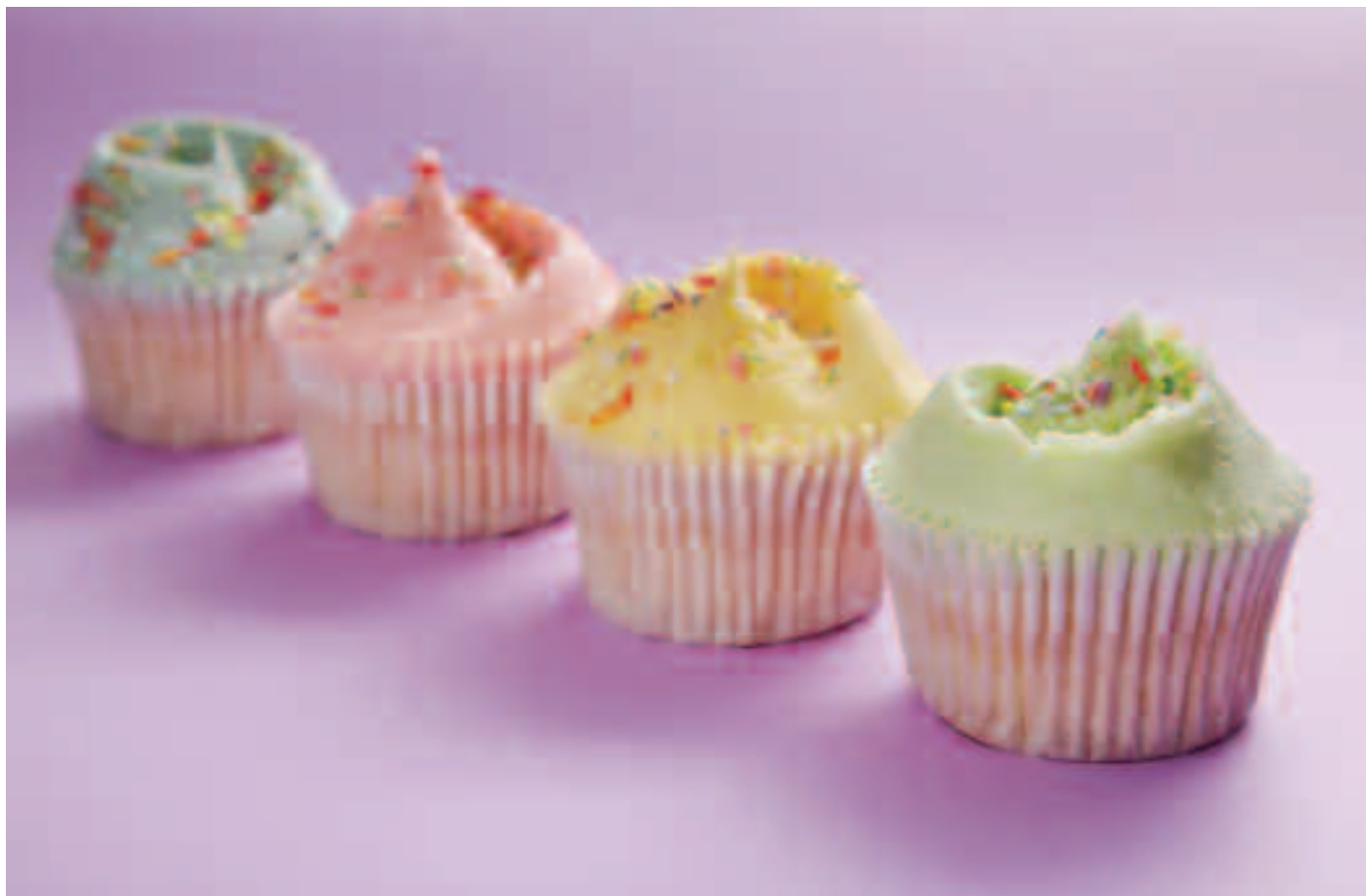


# The Cupcake Craze



One cup of butter, one cup of milk, one spoonful of baking soda, two cups of sugar, three cups of flour, and four eggs. Cupcakes are baking by numbers.

The humble cupcake evolved in the United States in the 19th century. It was revolutionary in culinary and baking terms because of the amount of time it saved in the kitchen. All of a sudden, ingredients no longer needed to be weighed. They could instead be measured, saving time and simplifying the baking process.

The origins of the name have been lost – perhaps the cakes were originally cooked in cups, or maybe the measurements contributed to the moniker. In Japan there is a magical

mixture sold as a cupcake that is literally that. Tip one packet into a cup, add an egg and microwave for one minute. Ta da! A cupcake. In literal terms the name has become somewhat disassociated with the process as cups are now rarely involved but there is no denying the allure of a cupcake.

In times gone by, cupcakes were convenient because they cooked faster than larger cakes. Hearth ovens provided irregular heat, meaning that baking a cake was a time consuming

process and the final product would often be burned in some places. Cupcakes avoided these issues. When muffin tins came into popular use around the turn of the 20th century, the cupcake became a firm fixture on the birthday party menu.

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Recently, the cupcake has been experiencing an unstoppable rise in the world of cakedom. Google recently confirmed their domination when they released statistics that included cupcakes as the fastest rising recipe search in the UK, sprinting well past the old-fashioned fairy cake in its naïve simplicity. The modern cupcake is a fanciful dream of a dessert. It beats a slice of cake, no matter how decadent, by increasing the icing to cake ratio. We all know after all, that the icing is the best part. Flavours once limited to chocolate and vanilla have now expanded into complex combinations such as a Cider Cupcakes with Marshmallow Frosting and Bacon Maple Cupcakes which offer a burst of American breakfast flavour.

In the UK, authentic American style cupcakes can be found at The Hummingbird Bakery, in branches in Notting Hill, South Kensington, Soho, Spitalfields and Islington and more projected, with expansion planned outside the capital. The company opened its first branch on Portobello Road in 2004 and now sells an average of 22,000 cupcakes per week. One of the key factors in the success of the cupcakes, as well as



their other treats, has been the focus on the idea that cakes taste best when they have been freshly baked using the same ingredients and techniques as used in home baking. Every Hummingbird Bakery branch has its own kitchen and team of resident bakers and decorators, meaning every item is freshly baked.

We are not just talking about standard flavours either. Naturally the favourites are there, from Chocolate to Red Velvet and Carrot Cake cupcakes, but the bakery also continues to innovate,

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introducing new cupcake flavours through its 'Daily Specials' series. The latest series was inspired by the flavours of chilled summer drinks, capturing the flavours of frothy milkshakes and smooth frappes. Flavours such as Caramel Frappe and Chai Tea almost sound like they are sponsored by Starbucks, while the Peanut Butter and Chocolate Milkshake Cupcake comes straight from a Malt Shop menu.

Whether you gobble down on a Chocolate Cupcake with Butter cream Frosting or lick the Cream Cheese icing from a Black Bottomed Cupcake, enjoy the selfish pleasure of this American-style single serve decadence. If you think you can resist the temptation, we dare you to look at the pictures on the Hummingbird Bakery website and tell us your mouth is not watering at the thought.



The Hummingbird Bakery's cupcakes and other treats can be found in their two cookbooks, *The Hummingbird Bakery Cookbook* and *The Hummingbird Bakery Cake Days*.

For more information or to order cupcakes online see: [www.hummingbirdbakery.com](http://www.hummingbirdbakery.com)

Makes 30

## Red Velvet Cupcakes

Hummingbird Bakery were unable to offer a cupcake recipe due to publishing rights, so we offer instead our own favourite American-style cupcake recipe.



### Ingredients for cupcakes

1/2 cup plain flour  
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1 cup butter, softened  
2 cups sugar  
4 eggs, room temperature  
1 cup sour cream  
1/2 cup milk

Red food colouring  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

### Ingredients for cream cheese icing

1 x 8oz package cream cheese, softened  
1/4 cup butter, softened  
2 tablespoons sour cream  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
16oz confectioners' sugar

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Mix the flour, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt in a bowl and set aside. Beat the butter and sugar with an electric mixer on medium for 5 minutes or until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs, one at a time. Mix in sour cream, milk, food colouring and vanilla. Gradually beat in the flour mixture on low speed until just blended. Spoon the batter into paper-lined muffin trays, filling each one 2/3 full. Bake for 20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the cupcake comes out clean. Cool for 5 minutes before removing from the trays.

Beat the cream cheese, softened butter, sour cream and vanilla extract until light and fluffy. Gradually beat in confectioners' sugar until smooth. Once the cupcakes are completely cool, frost liberally with the cream cheese icing.