

Food News

A few of our favorite things to share this month about local food and drink

Melons on the Menu. Watermelon is a perfect, versatile summer food. Experiment with new recipes for that juicy melon sitting on your counter. Blend it with something sweet like apple juice or honey for an unconventional chilled soup. Poke a popsicle stick in the rind of a triangular slice and pass it off to the kids as a cool, tasty treat. Or try watermelon salsa or gazpacho at your next picnic—one of the most summery appetizers around!



Summer Tastes Minty.

Cool down with something minty fresh. A **Mint & Lime Frozen Mojito** could be just the drink you need in August's sweltering heat. All this refreshing drink calls for is some frozen limeade concentrate, light rum (try key lime-flavored), fresh mint leaves and ice. Combine in a blender until smooth, then garnish your light-green elixir with lime slices and more mint leaves. Sip yours on the grass and in the shade!



Delaware Dines.

Our neighbor to the south is serving up two exciting food events. **World Café Live at The Queen** takes grilled cheese and beer and pairs them in innovative ways. Ever think to try a Yards Saison with Old Bay

cheddar on brioche with a mini crab cake? Now you have! Later, head to the **Second Annual Burger Battle** to sample burgers from area restaurants and vote for the People's Choice. More good news: Both events are vegetarian-friendly! *Grilled Cheese & Craft Beer Tasting: Aug. 21, 6 p.m. \$38. 500 N. Market St., Wilmington. 302-994-1400; Queen.WorldCafeLive.com. Burger Battle: Aug. 24, noon. \$50. Twin Lakes Brewing Company, 4210 Kennett Pk., Greenville. WilmingtonBurgerBattle.com.*



Dining's for the Dogs.

Tired of feeling bad about going to your favorite restaurant and chowing down in front of your furry friend? Feel guilty no longer. **Appetites on Main** now features a Doggie Menu for you and your pup to enjoy on the patio during these beautiful summer days. Buy Spot a hot dog or Fido some prime rib (cut into little pieces, of course). 286 Main St., Exton. 610-594-2030; AppetitesOnMain.com.

Cupcakes on High. Some of our favorite cupcakes on wheels are finding a permanent home in West Chester. **Dia Doce**, the green gourmet cupcake truck, is moving to South High Street this month. The sweet shop, sharing space with Cathey's Coffee Bar, uses all local, sustainable ingredients and even boasts vegan and gluten-free cupcakes. Stop by to indulge in yummy summer cupcake flavors, like Berry Lemonade and Peach Cobbler. 100 S. High St., West Chester. DiaDoce.com



Brandywine TABLE

Cupcakes

Laura Muzzi Brennan

Celebrate National Cupcake Day, December 15, the right way.

Cupcakes have garnered all sorts of press over the last few years. Writers at *The Huffington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Slate*, among others, analyzed the popularity of the cupcake, parsing its cultural underpinnings, its economic implications and its place in culinary history.

I learned a lot from these articles: the cupcake debuted in 19th century America; “Sex and the City” spurred its rebirth and a host of new terms—like cupcakery and cupcake-centric—now appear in the popular lexicon.

But no matter how intellectually sated I felt after reading, one pang remained, and it could be satisfied only by a butter-and-sugar reality. Fortunately, the Brandywine Valley offered promises of fulfillment in the form of **Cakes and Candies by Maryellen**, **Cupcakes Gourmet**, and **Dia Doce** (see sidebar).

At West Chester’s **Cakes and Candies by Maryellen**, Maryellen Bowers offers 16-18 varieties of cupcakes every week. During the winter holidays, Bowers creates cupcakes with warm-your-heart flavors like peppermint, cappuccino, hot chocolate and gingerbread. Throughout the year, popular varieties include lemon raspberry; chocolate blackout; pumpkin roll, and chocolate peanut butter cup. One that seems to enjoy unrivaled adoration: red velvet-white chocolate cheesecake.

Red velvet also claims “most popular” status at **Cupcakes Gourmet**, with locations in Malvern, Ardmore and Wayne. But, says founder and executive pastry chef Maki

Evans, classic vanilla and triple chocolate are on its heels. Triple chocolate?! Yes, you read that right: it’s a Belgian dark chocolate cake, topped with a dollop of milk chocolate icing and dipped in Belgian dark chocolate ganache.

Both Bowers and Evans put forth a few theories about why cupcakes, while never out of style, have become darlings of the dessert table. Besides being beautifully decorated (“cute” says Evans), cupcakes satisfy our desire for variety and convenience.

Instead of committing to one slice of one kind of cake, you can try a few different cupcakes for the same number of bites. Also, eating a cupcake requires no more than peeling a liner: for a quick indulgence, cupcakes, unlike butter, can’t be beat.

So, with the nod to the popular cookbook, what’s new cupcake? Bowers points to her cake pops, a cross between a cupcake and a lol-

lipop, as well as petite cupcakes. Evans notices more bakers marrying sweet and savory ingredients. Her maple-bacon cupcake—a vanilla buttermilk cupcake topped with maple glaze and bacon bits—tastes like a dessert version of pancakes and bacon. And for those who want to make cupcakes part of their ladies’ night out or team building activities, Evans recently opened a private party lounge at her Malvern location.

Cupcakes deserve all the attention they get. After all, as Maki Evans says, “There’s no sweeter way to bring smile to someone’s face.”



Cakes and Candies by Maryellen



Red Velvet Cupcakes from Cupcakes Gourmet

©Maki Evans



Dia Doce cupcakes

Classic Vanilla Cupcake with Vanilla Frosting

Everyone needs a classic vanilla cupcake in her baking repertoire. Recipe Courtesy Thais da Silva, Dia Doce.

For cupcakes:

- 1 C. butter, softened
- 2 C. sugar
- 3 eggs
- Seeds from one whole vanilla bean, scraped
- 3½ C. all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- 2 C. organic vanilla whole milk yogurt

For vanilla frosting:

- 1 C. butter
- Seeds from one whole vanilla bean, scraped
- 6 C. confectioners' sugar
- 5 Tb. milk

To make the cupcakes: Preheat oven to 350. Place liners in cupcake tins.

In a mixing bowl, cream the butter and sugar. Beat in eggs, one at a time. Add seeds from vanilla bean and mix well.

In another bowl, combine dry ingredients. Add dry ingredients to creamed mixture alternately with yogurt. The batter will be thick.

Fill cupcake liners ¾-full with batter and bake 26 minutes or until tops spring back when touched. Cool the cupcakes completely.

To make frosting: Using an electric mixer, whip butter for 3 minutes or until it is white and creamy. Add the confectioners' sugar, 1 cup at a time, until thoroughly combined. Add the milk, vanilla seeds and whip.

Makes 30 cupcakes.

Cinnamon Cupcakes with Streusel Cereal Topping

Perfect with a cup of tea or coffee to warm you on a chilly day. Courtesy of Thais da Silva of Dia Doce.

For the cupcakes:

- 1 C. butter, softened
- 1½ C. light brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2½ C. all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 C. milk

For the streusel cereal topping:

- ⅓ C. dark brown sugar
- ⅓ C. granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- ⅛ tsp. salt
- ½ C. butter, melted
- 1¾ C. flour
- ¼ C. rice cereal

To make the cupcakes: Preheat the oven to 350° and place liners in cupcake tins.

In a mixing bowl, cream the butter and sugar. Beat in eggs, one at a time.

In a separate bowl, combine the flour, baking soda, cinnamon and salt. To the butter-sugar mixture, add the dry ingredients alternately with the milk.

To make streusel cereal topping: Whisk sugars, cinnamon and salt into melted butter until smooth. Then, add flour with a spatula or wooden spoon. (It will look and feel like a solid dough.) Leave it pressed together in the bottom of the bowl and set aside. When ready to use, break apart with fingertips and stir in cereal. You will have approximately 3 C. topping.

Fill cupcake liners ¾-full with batter and cover with streusel topping. Bake 21 minutes or until tops spring back when touched. Cool the cupcakes completely.

Makes 24 cupcakes.

Chocolate Caramel Cupcakes

Thais da Silva of Dia Doce drizzles these cupcakes with melted chocolate for an extra layer of flavor.

For the cupcakes:

- 1 C. sugar
- ⅓ C. organic fair trade cocoa
- 1½ C. all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 C. water
- 3 eggs
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
- ½ C. butter, softened

For the caramel sauce:

- 1 C. sugar
- 6 Tb. butter
- ½ C. heavy whipping cream
- Optional: melted chocolate

To make the cupcakes: Preheat the oven to 350°. Place liners in cupcake tin.

Sift all dry ingredients into a mixing bowl; add all remaining ingredients; mix just until combined.

Behind the Scenes/Ovens with Dia Doce's Thais da Silva

Thais da Silva came to national attention when she won Food Network's "Cupcake Wars" in March 2012. Lucky for Brandywine Valley cupcake lovers, the owner and chief baker of Dia Doce still graces us with her presence and the decadent confections she sells from her signature lime green cupcake truck with marshmallow-white flourishes, of course.

When I finally caught up with Thais—she's on the move from 5 in the morning until 9 or 10 at night—we talked all matters cupcake.

Tell me about winning Food Network's "Cupcake Wars."

For the first round, I made gluten-free, vegan cupcake inspired by the thin mint Girl Scout cookie. At that point in the competition, the judges are not as concerned about how the cupcake looks; they judge by taste. In the next rounds, they care about appearance and taste, and they liked my pumpkin smores, cinnamon crumb and lemon-berry-basil cupcakes.

Lemon-berry-basil? How did you come up with that?

It's based on a cocktail I used to love when I was a fashion designer in New York City. Now it's Dia Doce's signature flavor. We grow the basil right outside the bakery. We use whatever local berries are in season. Basically, we use as many local and organic ingredients as we can. Some—like the basil, mint and cilantro—we grow ourselves.

Do customers give you ideas for cupcake flavors?

All the time! One guy suggested pumpkin-orange which we started baking just a month ago. Someone else thought a mojito cupcake with lime and mint would be great so we made that. Oh, and for any beer or wine festival we attend, we always make a whiskey-sour cupcake.

So cupcakes can be paired with alcoholic beverages?

Sure! When we did an event for Pennswood Winery, we created a blue cheese and fig cupcake to complement merlot and a pear and cinnamon cupcake to go with white zinfandel. But even when they have savory ingredients, cupcakes are always sweet.

What do you see in the future for Dia Doce?

Right now, our bakery is in Chester Springs, and we sell our cupcakes out of our truck at farmers markets and private events. Our goal is to have a destination bakery in Chester County, one where people can hang out, listen to good music and eat cupcakes, of course.

The Perfect Cupcake Inside and Out

Our cupcake experts offered their tips for making cupcakes that look and taste good from that first mouthful of frosting to that last crumb of cake.

Make sure all ingredients are at room temperature unless otherwise noted in the recipe. Some recipes call for boiling water or warm milk; other than that, room temperature is the way to go.

Try different flours to see what you like best. All-purpose flour contains a good deal of gluten, so don't overmix it or you could end up with rubbery cupcakes. Cake flour contains less gluten than all-purpose, making for a crumblier cupcake. For gluten-free baking mixes, try the shelves of your local grocery store or make your own. Many mixes use rice and tapioca flours along with cornstarch and xanthan gum.

Decorate the cupcake to indicate its flavor. For example, top a lemon cupcake with a small strip of candied lemon peel.

Check out your local arts and crafts store for cake decorating supplies like fondant, pastry bags and tips. That said, you don't need fancy equipment to make fancy cupcakes. For a do-it-yourself pastry bag, cut a tiny piece off the corner of a plastic Ziploc bag and pipe the icing through the opening.

Decorate with flair. Roll iced cupcakes in crushed peppermint, chopped up candy bars, sprinkles and colored sugar. Even humble graham cracker crumbs can turn a vanilla frosted cupcake into a beachscape!

Fill cupcake liners ¾-full with batter and bake 21 minutes or until tops spring back when touched. Cool the cupcakes completely.

To make caramel sauce: Using a heavy bottomed pan, melt sugar on low, stirring constantly until golden in color. Add butter and melt. Remove from heat and add heavy cream stirring vigorously. Mixture will foam. Let cool. You will have approximately 1 C. sauce.

Create a cavity and fill the cupcakes with caramel and if desired, drizzle with melted chocolate.

Makes 12 cupcakes.

Maple-Bacon Cupcakes

Bacon meets the classic cupcake in this recipe from Maki Evans, Cupcakes Gourmet.

For the vanilla buttermilk cupcakes:

- 6 Tb. unsalted butter
- 2 Tb. vegetable oil
- 1½ C. superfine sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tsp. Madagascar Bourbon vanilla extract
- 2¼ C. cake flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- ⅔ C. buttermilk

For maple glaze with bacon:

- 1¼ C. confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1 tsp. Madagascar Bourbon vanilla extract
- ¼ C. pure maple syrup
- 1 tsp. Maple Extract
- 1 C. cooked bacon

To make the cupcakes: Preheat oven to 350° and place cupcake liners into or butter cupcake tins. (Use ⅓ C. capacity tins.)

In a bowl, with a mixer on medium speed, beat butter, vegetable oil and the sugar until well blended. Add eggs, egg yolk and vanilla and beat on high speed until well blended.

In another bowl, sift flour, baking powder and salt.

With mixer on low speed, beat about a third of the flour mixture into butter mixture, then about a third of the buttermilk. Repeat process with remaining flour mixture and buttermilk, alternating in thirds. When all the flour is incorporated, beat mixture on medium speed just until well blended.

Fill cupcake liners ¾ full with batter (about ¼ C. in each). Bake until tops spring back when lightly touched in the center, 20 to 25 minutes. Cool on racks 5 minutes; remove from pans. Cool completely.

To make maple glaze: In a bowl, combine confectioners' sugar, vanilla and maple extract. Gradually whisk in enough maple syrup to a consistency where glaze can coat the back of a spoon. Dip the cupcakes in the glaze to coat and generously sprinkle with toasted bacon bits. Set-up on a plate for a few minutes until the glaze has set.

Makes 12–16 cupcakes.

Red Velvet Cupcakes with Cream Cheese Frosting

Recipe courtesy of Maki Evans, Cupcakes Gourmet.

For the cupcakes:

- 6 Tb. unsalted butter
- 3 Tb. vegetable oil
- 1½ C. superfine sugar
- 3 Tb. Belgian cocoa powder
- 4 Tb. red food coloring
- ½ tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. Madagascar bourbon vanilla extract, divided
- 1 C. buttermilk
- 2 C. cake flour, sifted
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. baking soda

For the cream cheese frosting:

- 8 oz. unsalted butter, softened
- 8 oz. cream cheese, cool
- 4 C. confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 2 tsp. Madagascar Bourbon vanilla extract
- 1 Tb. heavy cream
- Pinch of salt

To make the cupcakes: Preheat oven to 350° and place liners into or butter cupcake tins. (Use ⅓ C. capacity tins.)

In a bowl, with a mixer on medium speed, beat butter, oil and sugar until well blended.

In a separate bowl, make a paste of cocoa and red food coloring. Add to creamed mixture.

In another bowl, mix salt, 1 teaspoon vanilla and buttermilk together. Add eggs and remaining teaspoon vanilla and beat on high speed until well blended.

Sift flour, baking powder and salt into another bowl. With mixer on low speed, alternate adding flour mixture and buttermilk mixture into butter mixture, alternating by thirds. When all the flour is incorporated, beat mixture on medium speed until just well blended.

Fill cupcake tins about ¾ full with batter (about ¼ C. in each). Bake until tops spring back when lightly touched in the center, 20 to 25 minutes. Cool on racks 5 minutes; remove from pans. Cool completely.

To make the frosting: In a large bowl, beat together the butter and cream cheese with an electric mixer. With the mixer on low speed, add the confectioners' sugar a cup at a time until incorporated. Beat in the vanilla extract, heavy cream and salt for 5 minutes or until smooth and creamy.

Makes 12–16 cupcakes.

Coconut Cupcakes with Chocolate Drizzle

I love Mounds candy bars, so I translated the flavor into a cupcake.

¾ C. unsalted butter
1¼ C. sugar
3 large eggs
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 C. canned coconut milk
2½ C. cake flour
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking powder
½ C. sweetened shredded coconut

For the topping:

1 C. your favorite vanilla or chocolate frosting
1 C. sweetened shredded coconut
1 C. bittersweet or semi-sweet chocolate chips

To make the cupcakes: Preheat oven to 350°. Place cupcake liners in tins.

With an electric mixer, cream butter and sugar together in a large bowl. Mix in eggs, vanilla and coconut milk. (Make sure you shake the can of coconut milk well.)

In a separate bowl, combine flour, salt and baking powder. Add flour mixture to butter mixture and blend until

ingredients are just combined. Fold in shredded coconut.

Ladle batter into cupcake liners, filling each $\frac{2}{3}$. Bake 15 to 20 minutes. Cupcakes are ready when a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool cupcakes in the pan for a few minutes. Then remove to a rack and allow to cool completely.

Spread frosting on each cupcake and top with shredded coconut. Melt chocolate chips in a small pan over low heat. Using a spoon, drizzle melted chocolate on top of cupcakes.

Makes 24 cupcakes.

Mint Chocolate Cupcakes

Once Thais da Silva mentioned cupcakes inspired by the Girl Scout cookie, Thin Mints, I couldn't stop thinking about it. This recipe is my nod to that beloved cookie.

2 C. sugar
2 C. cake flour
¾ C. cocoa powder
1½ tsp. baking powder
1½ tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. salt
2 large eggs
½ vegetable or olive oil

½ tsp. peppermint extract
1½ C. milk, room temperature
1 C. Andes Crème de Menthe baking chips (plus more for decorating cupcakes)

1 C. of your favorite chocolate icing

Preheat oven to 350°. Place cupcake liners in tins.

In a large bowl, mix sugar, flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda and salt until well combined. Add remaining ingredients, except Andes chips, and mix with an electric mixer until just combined.

Ladle batter into each cupcake paper $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ full. Spoon Andes chips into each cupcake. (You don't need to stir them in.) Bake for 15-20 minutes until a toothpick inserted in the center of a cupcake comes out clean. Cool cupcakes in the pan for a few minutes. Then remove to a rack and allow to cool completely.

Spread each cupcake with frosting, and if desired, top with Andes chips.

Makes 24 cupcakes. ♦

To contact Laura, please e-mail her at LauraBrenman@ValleyDel.com.