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# Great on a cold day Tips on serving the perfect cup of coffee

Nothing beats a good cup of coffee, especially on a cold winter day. If you're entertaining this holiday season, it's particularly important to serve perfect coffee to your guests. But how do you ensure a good cup every time? While the ideal cup of coffee is an individual preference involving many factors, there are really no secrets to brewing a perfect cup. All it takes is the right tools and a little bit of practice.

### Fresh, flavorful beans

Most people are accustomed to using pre-ground, packaged coffee from their local supermarkets. But the best cup of coffee is actually made from freshly ground, whole coffee beans. These whole beans, which are available in many supermarkets and gourmet food stores, vary in color and flavor, depending on the region in which they were cultivated and the degree of roasting. Flavored coffees, like mocha almond, are coffee beans that have had various flavors added to them after roasting.

Experiment with various blends and roasts to discover the one(s) that best suit your tastes. Buy small amounts of coffee beans and sample at home. A coffee salesperson should be able to answer any questions about different blends and roasts.

### Grinding coffee

Once you've selected the beans, you'll need to grind them. Since ground coffee loses its flavor quickly, it's best to grind the beans right before brewing. Most stores will grind the beans for you but, to ensure maximum flavor, you'll probably want to buy your own grinder.

### For best taste, aroma

Most grinders will grind a pot's worth of coffee in 10 to 20 seconds. Keep in mind that the finer the grind, the stronger the taste. If you're using an automatic drip

coffeemaker, a medium grind is a good rule of thumb.

The final step to making perfect coffee is the brewing cycle. Two factors determine a good or bad pot of coffee — water temperature and brewing time.

Generally, drip coffee should be brewed at 195 degrees Fahrenheit for about six minutes.

### Brewing coffee

On average you should use 1 1/2 to two level tablespoons of coffee grounds per cup of cold water, adjusting for personal taste and the coffeemaker's cup size.

Always use a clean coffeemaker and remove the grounds from the brew as soon as the brewing cycle is completed, to prevent bitterness. Never re-use grounds or reheat cooled coffee.

### Ideal temperature

Brewed coffee generally stays fresh for one hour. Some coffeemakers have special insulated carafes.

Now that you know the basics, have some fun this holiday season

by serving your guests perfect coffee, alone or in the following festive recipes:

### MOCHA MINT

1 cup prepared coffee  
1 pint chocolate ice cream  
1/4 cup creme de menthe  
very thin chocolate-mint wafers  
Combine coffee, ice cream and creme de menthe in blender container. Blend on low speed. Spoon into sherbet or wine glasses. Garnish each serving with a chocolate-mint wafer. Makes 4 servings.

### CAFE MEXICANO

4 teaspoons chocolate syrup  
1/2 cup heavy cream  
3/4 teaspoon cinnamon  
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg  
1 tablespoon sugar  
1 1/2 cups strong, hot coffee  
Put 1 teaspoon chocolate syrup into each of 4 small cups. Combine cream, 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon, nutmeg and sugar. Whip. Stir remaining 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon into hot coffee.

Pour coffee into cups. Stir to blend with syrup. Top with whipped cream.

## Trivia answers

- 1) In 349 A.D. Pope Julius set the date.
- 2) Henry VIII.
- 3) Christmas is in Florida; Santa Claus is in Indiana.
- 4) In 1843, the same year "A Christmas Carol" was written. It was sent by London businessman Henry Cole and designed by artist John Calcott Horsley.
- 5) North America. Egg nog was popularized in the Old South, with tradition dictating that the man of the house serve the frothy drink!
- 6) These celebrities all produced original artwork reproduced by Hallmark on Christmas cards.
- 7) The Puritan Parliament of Britain abolished Christmas Day in 1652, claiming it was immoral to be idle for a day. In 1659, Puritan Massachusetts also fined anyone who observed Christmas the sum of five shillings.
- 8) "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You!" This was also the very first published sentiment in 1843.
- 9) "A Visit from St. Nicholas", (Twas the Night Before Christmas) by Dr. Clement Clarke Moore.

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