PLEXA

RECIPE & TECHNIQUE GUIDE

The Plexa Café

19 café drinks, the foam secrets behind a crisp design, and ideas far beyond the cup.

WELCOME

A little art in your everyday

Every great Plexa design starts with two things: a smooth, sturdy foam and a light dusting of fine powder. This guide shows you how to get both, then gives you a café menu to put them on, with or without an espresso machine.

Five steps to a design

1. **Load.** Flip Plexa over and spoon in about **½ teaspoon** of sifted cocoa or cinnamon: enough to cover the mesh in a thin, even layer. Press the mesh disc flat. One load usually makes a few cups; top up when designs look patchy.
2. **Close.** Turn it upright.
3. **Insert.** Hold a stencil card flat and slide it into the slot under the lens.
4. **Press.** Set Plexa level on the rim of your cup and tap the gold button.
5. **Lift.** Lift straight up, slowly. Serve right away.

You'll also need: fine unsweetened cocoa or ground cinnamon from your pantry (Plexa doesn't come with powder), milk, and something to froth it with. Any frother works, even a French press or a jar.

THE SECRET

Foam that holds a design

Almost every blurry design comes down to the foam, not the tool. You're aiming for a cappuccino-style cap: thick, smooth and level.

The target

- **At least ½ inch** of foam on top. Thin latte foam lets the design sink.
- **Tiny bubbles**, glossy and fine, with no big ones popping.
- **Level and just below the rim.** Never domed: foam that touches Plexa pulls the design off.
- **A clean, dry rim**, so Plexa sits flat.

Heat it right

- Start with milk **straight from the fridge**. Milk left out to warm on the counter foams worst of all.
- Stop at **130–150°F**: hot to touch, never bubbling at the edge. Hotter milk tastes cooked and the foam goes flat.
- Use **fresh milk**. Older milk fizzes into big bubbles, whatever you do.
- Warm the mug, not the finished foam.

Which milk?

MILK	HOW IT FOAMS	USE IT FOR
Whole or 2%	Creamy, sturdy foam; the reliable choice. Lactose-free whole milk froths the same way.	Everyday default
Skim	The most volume: a taller, stiffer cap, less creamy.	If your designs sink
Barista oat milk	The best dairy-free foamer; foams well even cold. Popular picks: Oatly Barista or Full Fat, Pacific Barista, Califia Barista, Minor Figures, Elmhurst Barista.	Dairy-free and iced caps
Regular almond, rice, coconut	Usually won't hold a foam. Look for the word "barista" on the carton.	Skip for caps
Heavy cream	Doesn't froth well hot; perfect for cold foam and whipped toppings.	Cold foam (page 12)

Every frother is different. If one milk gives you a sturdier cap at home, that's your milk.

TECHNIQUE

Frothing four ways

Every method follows the same pattern: let in a little air near the surface, then sink in and swirl to turn big bubbles into tiny ones. Finish by tapping the jug on the counter, swirling and resting it for 30 seconds.

Electric frother

Aeroccino, Bodum, Breville and similar

Fill only to the **lower foam line** (about 4 oz on an Aeroccino) and choose the airy or cappuccino setting. These frothers make thick, stiff foam: exactly what a stencil wants. Too much? Spoon off the extra.

Handheld wand

Battery or rechargeable

Warm the milk first (microwave in 30-second bursts). Use a tall container no more than half full. Hold the wand like a pen at a slight angle, lift it near the surface a few times to add air, then plunge it to make a whirlpool until the big bubbles are gone. Fresh batteries help.

French press

No frother needed

Warm the milk and fill the press only halfway. Give two or three long pulls near the top for air, then lots of short, quick pumps low in the milk, then swirl. You'll get a soft, mousse-like foam.

Jar and microwave

The pantry method

Fill a microwave-safe jar one-third full of cold milk, seal and shake hard for 30–60 seconds. Remove the lid and microwave for about 30 seconds: the heat sets the foam.

The tall-cap trick for handheld wands: froth about ½ cup cold skim milk in a glass measuring cup for 1–2 minutes, then microwave for about 25 seconds and watch it rise. Stop as it reaches the top. It makes a tall, sturdy cap.

Building the cup

1. Coffee (and syrup) in the cup. **2.** Pour in the milk while holding the foam back with a spoon. **3.** Spoon the foam on until it sits just under the rim. **4.** Smooth it level with the back of the spoon. **5.** Plexa within a minute, and serve within about five.

Foam not cooperating? A layer of whipped cream smoothed flat with a knife takes a design beautifully.

YOUR POWDER PANTRY

Fine, dry, unsweetened

Plexa doesn't come with powder: use what's in your pantry. The finer and drier it is, the crisper your design.

Cocoa

Dutch-process cocoa (labeled "processed with alkali") is darker and mellower than natural cocoa, so it shows best on white foam. Hershey's Special Dark is easy to find; King Arthur's Double-Dark is darker still. Regular natural cocoa works too, just lighter and redder.

Cinnamon & spices

Most supermarket cinnamon (cassia or Saigon) is dark and bold, which is great for contrast. It gives a softer, warmer design than cocoa. Nutmeg is lovely on eggnog and gingerbread drinks. Spice blends like pumpkin pie spice: sift them well first.

Never use hot-cocoa mix. Its sugar crystals break up the foam and make grainy designs. Plain, unsweetened cocoa only.

Good habits

- **Sift once** into a small dry jar before loading: no clumps, no holes.
- **About ½ teaspoon per load**: a thin, even layer over the mesh gives sharper edges than a heap. Top up when designs look patchy.
- Store powders **airtight in a dry cupboard** and use a dry spoon.
- Tap out leftover powder when you're done for the day.
- After washing, let the mesh and cards **dry completely** before refilling.

Feeling adventurous?

Try new powders on a saucer first:

- **Matcha**: green on white; sift it, it clumps.
- **Freeze-dried strawberry**: grind, sift, use right away for pink designs.
- **Skip** powdered sugar and espresso powder on hot foam: both dissolve.
- Turmeric and beet stain, so rinse promptly.

Edible glitter? The FDA's rule: only use products labeled "edible" that list their ingredients. "Non-toxic" or "for decorative purposes only" means it isn't food.

NO ESPRESSO MACHINE? NO PROBLEM

Make a café base at home

Every recipe in this guide uses **a double shot: about 2 oz (¼ cup) of strong coffee**. Here's how to make it with what you have.

WHAT YOU HAVE	HOW TO MAKE ABOUT 2 OZ
Espresso machine	A double shot.
Nespresso or Keurig	One espresso pod, or the K-Café's SHOT button with any K-Cup.
AeroPress	About 18 g (3 Tbsp) finely ground coffee and 3 oz just-off-boil water, upside-down method: stir, steep 90 seconds, flip and press gently.
Moka pot	Water just below the valve, coffee level but not packed, medium heat. Take it off the heat as soon as it starts to sputter.
Instant espresso	1–3 tsp powder in 2 oz hot water, to taste.
Drip coffee	Use 4 oz extra-strong coffee in place of 2 oz espresso, for a milder, larger drink.

Syrups, the café way

VANILLA

1 cup sugar, ½ cup just-boiled water, 2 tsp vanilla paste or extract, a tiny pinch of salt. Stir until dissolved.

BROWN SUGAR CINNAMON

Equal parts brown sugar and water plus 2–3 cinnamon sticks. Simmer 5 minutes, cool, strain.

HONEY CINNAMON

½ cup honey, ½ cup water, 1 cinnamon stick. Warm until steaming, rest 10 minutes.

Café rules of thumb: 1 Tbsp of syrup is about one café pump. Keep syrup to about a tenth of the drink: café-sized doses taste too sweet in a home mug. A pinch of salt makes any syrup taste richer. Homemade syrups keep about 2–4 weeks in the fridge.

THE CLASSICS

Where every design begins

01

The Plexa cappuccino

DUST WITH COCOA OR CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 2 oz espresso or strong coffee base
- 4 oz cold whole or 2% milk
- A warmed 6–8 oz wide cup

MAKE IT

Froth the milk to a stiff, glossy foam. Pour in the coffee, add the milk while holding back the foam, then spoon the foam on until it sits just under the rim. Level it with the back of the spoon.

Plexa tip: This is the drink Plexa was made for: the thickest, most forgiving canvas in the guide. Cocoa is the classic Italian dusting.

Technique adapted from Complete Home Barista

02

Vanilla latte

DUST WITH COCOA OR CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 1 Tbsp vanilla syrup (page 6)
- 2 oz espresso or strong coffee base
- 5 oz milk

MAKE IT

Syrup into the cup, then the coffee. Froth the milk, pour it in holding the foam back, and finish with a thick spooned cap.

Plexa tip: Build it cappuccino-style on top: a ½-inch cap holds a design far better than thin latte foam.

Adapted from Morgan Eckroth's vanilla latte (about 860K views on YouTube)

Warm, cozy, and made for cinnamon

03

Honey cinnamon latte

DUST WITH CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 1 Tbsp honey cinnamon syrup (page 6)
- 2 oz espresso, or 4 oz strong coffee
- 4 oz milk, frothed

MAKE IT

Stir the syrup into the coffee, add the frothed milk and spoon the foam cap level.

Plexa tip: A cinnamon design on a cinnamon drink: dust lightly for a soft, golden look.

Adapted from Champagne Tastes

04

Brown sugar cinnamon latte

DUST WITH CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 1 Tbsp brown sugar cinnamon syrup (page 6)
- 2 oz espresso or strong coffee base
- 6 oz milk
- Optional: ¼ tsp ground cinnamon and a pinch of salt in the cup

MAKE IT

Stir the syrup (and optional cinnamon and salt) into the hot coffee. Add the milk, then a thick foam cap.

Plexa tip: Stir ground cinnamon into the coffee, not onto the foam, so only your design sits on top.

Adapted from The Wanderlust Kitchen and Combine Good Flavors; cinnamon dolce syrup copycat 5★ from 15 reader ratings (Emily Fabulous)

Cinnamon or cocoa? Cinnamon gives a soft, warm, golden design; cocoa gives crisp, dark lines. On a cinnamon drink, a cocoa design pops, and a cinnamon one feels cozy. Try both, or mix them half and half.

Cocoa on cocoa

05

Five-minute mocha

DUST WITH COCOA

YOU'LL NEED

- 2 tsp honey
- 1 tsp unsweetened cocoa
- A good pinch of salt
- 2 oz espresso, or 1 tsp instant espresso with a splash of hot water
- 5 oz milk

MAKE IT

Stir the honey, cocoa and salt into a smooth sauce right in the mug. Add the coffee and stir. Froth the milk and finish with a level foam cap.

Plexa tip: No machine needed, and it's the most Plexa drink there is: a cocoa design on a chocolate cup.

Adapted from Morgan Eckroth's honey mocha (about 124K views on YouTube)

06

Mexican mocha latte

DUST WITH CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 6 oz strong coffee or 2 oz espresso
- 2 Tbsp powdered sugar
- 1 Tbsp unsweetened cocoa
- ¼ tsp cinnamon, ¼ tsp nutmeg
- A pinch of cayenne (optional)
- 3–4 oz milk, frothed

MAKE IT

Whisk the sugar, cocoa and spices into the hot coffee until smooth. Top with the frothed milk and a level cap.

Plexa tip: The original is a cream-topped coffee. We've swapped the cream for a frothed cap so it can take a design.

Adapted from A Spicy Perspective: 4.85★ from 26 reader ratings

Chocolate drinks need a white top. A dark mocha hides a cocoa design, so always finish with a pale foam cap. Then cocoa on cocoa looks rich and crisp.

FALL FAVORITES

Pumpkin, maple & spice

07

Pumpkin spice latte

DUST WITH CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 2 Tbsp pumpkin purée
- 1½ Tbsp sugar or maple
- ½ tsp pumpkin pie spice
- ½ cup strong coffee (or 2 oz espresso)
- ½ cup whole milk
- Plus ⅓ cup milk for the cap

MAKE IT

Warm the pumpkin, sugar, spice, coffee and milk in a small pan, whisking, until steaming (don't boil). Pour into a mug.

Plexa tip: Froth the extra ⅓ cup of plain milk separately for a clean white cap.

Adapted from Bigger Bolder Baking: 4.5★ from 283 reader ratings, the most of any recipe we found

08

Maple latte

DUST WITH CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 1–2 Tbsp pure maple syrup
- 2 oz espresso or strong coffee base
- ½ cup milk

MAKE IT

Maple into the cup, then the coffee. Froth the milk and spoon on a thick cap.

Plexa tip: Use real maple syrup, not pancake syrup.

Adapted from The Slow Roasted Italian

09

Chai & dirty chai

DUST WITH CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- Serves 2: 3 cinnamon sticks, 5 cloves, 4 cardamom pods, 2 star anise, 1 tsp peppercorns
- 1 in fresh ginger, sliced
- 2½ cups milk, 2 black tea bags
- 2 tsp maple or honey

MAKE IT

Toast the whole spices 1–2 minutes, add the milk and ginger and simmer 5 minutes. Off the heat, steep the tea 10 minutes covered. Strain, sweeten and top with foam.

Plexa tip: Dirty chai: add 2 oz espresso per cup. Evening cup: use decaf tea.

Adapted from Love and Lemons: 5★ from 10 reader ratings

Seasonal secret: recipes simmered in one pot (pumpkin spice, peppermint mocha) make a rich drink with little foam. Froth a little plain milk separately and spoon it on top for a clean, white canvas.

Gingerbread & peppermint

10

Gingerbread latte

DUST WITH NUTMEG OR CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- Syrup (about 7 drinks): 2 cups water, 1½ cups sugar, 2 tsp ground ginger, ½ tsp cinnamon, ½ tsp vanilla
- Per drink: 2 Tbsp syrup, 2 oz espresso or strong coffee base, 6 oz milk

MAKE IT

For the syrup, bring the water, sugar and spices to a boil, then simmer uncovered 15 minutes and stir in the vanilla. Build the drink: syrup, coffee, milk, thick foam cap.

Plexa tip: A nutmeg design looks especially festive on gingerbread.

Syrup adapted from Top Secret Recipes: 4.7★ from 14 reader ratings

11

Peppermint mocha

DUST WITH COCOA

YOU'LL NEED

- 1 cup strong coffee (or 2 oz espresso plus 6 oz hot water)
- ½ cup milk
- 1 oz bittersweet chocolate, chopped
- ⅛ tsp peppermint extract
- Plus ⅓ cup milk for the cap

MAKE IT

Simmer the coffee, milk and chocolate for 2 minutes, whisking until smooth. Off the heat, stir in the peppermint.

Plexa tip: Skip the whipped cream: froth the extra milk for a white cap and dust a cocoa design.

Adapted from Bigger Bolder Baking: 4.7★ from 112 reader ratings

Eggnog latte

Froth eggnog the same way you froth milk (it foams beautifully), pour it over 2 oz espresso or strong coffee, and dust with nutmeg or cinnamon.

Cool drinks, quick hands

Cold foam is thick and creamy but melts faster than hot foam, so **Plexa it within the first minute** and serve right away.

12

Vanilla sweet cream cold brew

DUST WITH COCOA

YOU'LL NEED

- ¼ cup heavy cream
- 2 Tbsp 2% milk
- 2 Tbsp vanilla syrup (page 6)
- 6 oz cold brew over ice

MAKE IT

Pump the cream, milk and syrup in a French press (half full) about 40 times until roughly doubled, or use a frother's cold setting or a shaken jar. Spoon over the cold brew.

Plexa tip: A cocoa design on cold foam: the one iced drink cafés stencil too.

Adapted from Oh How Civilized: 4.9★ from 27 reader ratings

13

Iced brown sugar oat shaken espresso

DUST WITH CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 1½ tsp brown sugar, a pinch of cinnamon
- 2 oz espresso or strong coffee base
- Ice
- Oat milk, plus ¼ cup cold barista oat milk for the cap

MAKE IT

Put the sugar, cinnamon and ice in a jar, pour over the hot coffee and shake hard for a minute. Pour over fresh ice and top with oat milk.

Plexa tip: Froth the ¼ cup barista oat milk cold: oat foams better cold than dairy does.

Adapted from Morgan Eckroth (about 960K views) and Nutmeg Nanny

14

Pumpkin cream cold brew

DUST WITH CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 3 Tbsp heavy cream, 1 Tbsp whole milk
- 1 Tbsp maple syrup, 1 tsp pumpkin purée
- ⅛ tsp pumpkin pie spice, a few drops vanilla, a pinch of salt
- Cold brew over ice

MAKE IT

Froth the cream mixture until just thickened and spoon it over the cold brew.

Plexa tip: Thicken just enough to float; stiff foam won't spread level.

Adapted from Buttered Side Up (about 1M views on YouTube)

Keep cold foam for coffee and tea: acidic fruit drinks curdle cream within seconds. Stir spices into the syrup; dust only the foam.

Cozy cups for any hour

15

Babyccino

DUST WITH COCOA OR CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- ¼ cup cold milk
- A small cup and a spoon

MAKE IT

Froth until doubled, warming only to lukewarm (about 113°F). Spoon into a small cup and let the kids press the button.

Plexa tip: Supervise little ones around hot drinks. Marshmallows are a choking risk for children under 4.

Method from Barista Hustle

16

Real hot chocolate

DUST WITH COCOA OR CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 1 cup whole milk, 1 Tbsp heavy cream
- 2 Tbsp unsweetened cocoa
- 1½ Tbsp brown sugar
- ¼ tsp vanilla

MAKE IT

Whisk everything in a small pan over medium heat until hot and smooth, without boiling.

Plexa tip: Top with a frothed-milk cap, or whipped cream left to relax flat, so the design shows.

Adapted from Joshua Weissman; batch version 4.9★ from 51 reader ratings (Love and Lemons)

17

London Fog

DUST WITH COCOA OR CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- 1 Earl Grey tea bag (decaf for evenings)
- ½ cup hot water, ½ cup milk
- ¼ tsp vanilla, 1–2 tsp honey

MAKE IT

Steep the tea 3–5 minutes and sweeten. Froth the milk with the vanilla and pour it over, finishing with the foam.

Plexa tip: Heat the milk in your frother, not on the stove: stovetop milk won't foam.

Adapted from The Healthy Maven: 4.6★ from 47 reader ratings

18

Golden milk

DUST WITH CINNAMON

YOU'LL NEED

- Serves 2: 1½ cups light coconut milk, 1½ cups almond milk
- 1½ tsp ground turmeric, ¼ tsp ground ginger
- 1 cinnamon stick, a pinch of black pepper
- 1 Tbsp maple

MAKE IT

Warm everything gently for about 4 minutes, whisking, without boiling. Top with a frothed-milk cap.

Plexa tip: Turmeric stains, so rinse Plexa soon after.

Adapted from Minimalist Baker: 4.85★ from 271 reader ratings

Bonus, matcha latte (contains caffeine): whisk ½–1 tsp sifted matcha with ¼ cup hot water, add ¼ cup warm milk and top with foam. A cocoa design looks striking on green. Adapted from Love and Lemons (4.9★ from 35 reader ratings).

BEYOND THE CUP

Desserts, brunch & more

A design holds on any surface that's **cool or set, dry on top, smooth and flat**. Use dark powder on light surfaces and a light one on dark.

SURFACE	DUST WITH	TIP
Whipped cream, foam, cold foam	Cocoa, cinnamon	Smooth whipped cream flat with a knife first.
Cheesecake, panna cotta, pots de crème, mousse	Cocoa, cinnamon	Chill until set, then decorate just before serving.
Frosted cupcakes	Cocoa	Spread white frosting flat; bold designs read best.
Pancakes, French toast	Cocoa	Let the steam escape first; serve syrup on the side.
Foamy cocktails (21+)	Cocoa, cinnamon, nutmeg	See the Irish coffee on the next page.

Single servings shine

Plexa's designs are cup-sized, so they're perfect on ramekins, cupcakes and individual desserts. For a whole cake, repeat the design in a pattern.

Moist surfaces

On anything wet or warm, powder slowly soaks in. Decorate at the last moment and serve right away.

HOSTING

Make it a moment

Coffee & cocoa bar

Froth in batches, set out cocoa and cinnamon in little jars, fan out your stencil cards and let each guest choose. One person runs Plexa so the line keeps moving.

Brunch set

Use the same design on each guest's cappuccino and on their pancakes for a matched set that gets everyone's phones out.

Dessert course

Chill panna cotta or cheesecake in ramekins and decorate them at the counter just before serving.

Through the seasons

Leaves and pumpkins in fall, snowflakes in December, hearts in February, whichever designs are in your set.

19 · 21+

Irish coffee

DUST WITH NUTMEG OR COCOA

- 1½ oz Irish whiskey
- 4 oz hot brewed coffee
- ½ oz demerara syrup (1:1 sugar and water)
- About 1 oz heavy cream, barely whipped

Stir the whiskey, coffee and syrup in a warmed 6 oz glass. Float about an inch of soft, pourable cream on top and add your design.

Adapted from The Dead Rabbit's recipe (Punch). Please enjoy responsibly.

Photograph your design

- Soft **window light from the side**; turn off overhead lights.
- Shoot **straight down** so the design stays round.
- Take the photo **within 30 seconds** of lifting.
- Keep it simple: a saucer, a spoon, a little cocoa.

TROUBLESHOOTING

If your design isn't quite right

Design sinks or breaks up	Froth longer, then tap, swirl and rest 30 s. Try skim or 2% for a stiffer cap.
Foam fizzes and pops	Use fresher milk, straight from the fridge.
Foam flat, tastes cooked	Stop at 130–150°F; never boil.
Oat or almond won't foam	Choose a "barista" edition.
Design smudged or pulled off	Foam was domed or touching Plexa: level it just below the rim and wipe the rim.
One side blurry	Set Plexa level on the rim, and use a cup it sits flat on.
Heavy, fuzzy edges	Load less powder: about ½ teaspoon in a thin, even layer.
Patchy or faint design	Top up the powder and spread it evenly over the mesh.
Spots and holes	Sift the powder; keep it, the mesh and the cards dry.
Grainy design that melts	Use plain unsweetened cocoa, never hot-cocoa mix or powdered sugar.
Hard to see	Dark powder on light foam. Cinnamon on a mocha won't show; cocoa on white will.
Faded before serving	Plexa it within a minute and serve right away, especially cold foam.

Care

When you're done for the day, tap out leftover powder. Rinse the cards and mesh in warm water and let everything air-dry completely before the next use.

Want a new look every morning? The 30-design stencil pack is sold separately or in the Creator bundle at getplexa.us.

Questions? Email getplexa@gmail.com: a real person reads every one. Recipes are adapted from the sources credited on each card; star ratings are reader ratings on those sites.