



# Chocolate...

## Why Do We Love It So?

Since 1100 BC chocolate has been one of the most popular flavors on earth. Simply uttering the word “chocolate” evokes “oohs” and “ahhs” from just about any audience. What makes it fabulous and why do we love it so? Ah, let me count the ways... BY LIBBY MCNAMEE

**C**hocolate is one of life’s simple pleasures. Known as “food of the Gods” to the ancient Mayans, even just a morsel can energize and create a happier state of mind. It’s no wonder—chocolate actually does raise both endorphin and serotonin levels, reducing stress and enhancing moods, even creating feelings of euphoria. What’s not to love?

Speaking of love, chocolate has also been revered throughout history as an aphrodi-

siac—inspiring feelings of well, joy. While this has never been officially verified by medical science, (but really, who needs “official” verification anyway?) we do know that chocolate contains phenylethylamine, a chemical our brains release along with serotonin when we experience feelings of love or passion. Researchers discount the amount as too small to have any real effect on desire, but certainly belief in the seductive power of chocolate produces its own psychological benefit.

And let’s not forget that refreshing burst of caffeine and sugar we get when we bite into this delicious confection, or the health benefits of dark chocolate. Since it is made with plants, it contains many of the health benefits offered by dark vegetables, especially its flavonoids, which act as antioxidants. In fact, heart-healthy dark chocolate has almost eight times the antioxidants found in strawberries. But it gets better. Chocolate—a potential “super food”—can also lower both blood pressure

and bad cholesterol.

And here is the best reason of all to love chocolate... It is a remarkably affordable indulgence. A fancy truffle is less than the price of a manicure, a cocktail or even a latte. And though inexpensive, it can be an elegantly packaged splurge, a welcome treat for you or someone who needs a quick pick-me-up or a little something that says, “You’re amazing!”

Here are a few of our favorite chocolateries in Richmond. Now go ahead—indulge.



TOP: Candied orange peel, dipped in bittersweet Venezuelan chocolate from Gearharts Fine Chocolates.  
BOTTOM: Assorted artisan chocolates from Chocolates by Kelly.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM EWING



**A**fter 19 years in Carytown, For the Love of Chocolate has earned its place as a Richmond icon worth drooling over. With well over 10,000 products from 300 vendors and 32 countries, this amazing chocolate store has literally got it all, including 800 different types of chocolate. It's no wonder they sell an average of 400 pounds of chocolate a day. (Yes, that's every day!) Store manager James Kinard raves, "The best part of my job is going to trade shows and visiting other chocolate shops so I can bring my favorites back to my customers." You'll also find every flavor of popular and unique chocolates and candies. The store features Virginia products, British chocolate, Dutch licorice and weekly shipments from Belgium. They also provide an array of custom molded chocolate and personalized favor boxes. It's like a tour of the world—in chocolate.

## FOR THE LOVE OF CHOCOLATE

3136 West Cary Street  
359-5645 | LovChoc.com

THIS PAGE: Truffe fantasie by Gayaux Chocolatier-France, crème brûlée truffle by Maggie Lyon Chocolatier-Atlanta, peanut butter sundae bash and white amaretto truffles by Sweet Shop-Texas. OPPOSITE: An assortment of truffles including flavors like black forest, bananas foster, lemon, port, Aztec, mocha madness and milk overboard. Painted chocolates by Birnn Chocolatier.

## SWEET SPOT

West Broad Village  
2228 Old Brick Road  
360-SPOT|ShopSweetSpot.com

**C**onveniently located in Short Pump near Whole Foods, this welcoming store is new on the chocolate scene and sure to hit the spot. It's a bright and happy place packed with enough candy to impress even Willy Wonka. Along with a wide assortment of gourmet chocolates from all over the country, the store also offers over 180 bins of bulk candy, including chocolate and retro candy. This is a wonderful place to munch on some treats while sitting at its big table playing a game of vintage Candyland, or twirling on its funky silver stools. Co-owner Chrissy Triano explains, "Our goal is to truly make this a sweet experience for everyone who visits, so we've got something for everyone." They also host birthday parties and offer the best goodie bag ever: tackle boxes filled to the brim—you guessed it—candy.



**L**ocated in the heart of Westover Hills, Chocolates by Kelly is tucked inside the new TaZa Coffees 'n' Crème, formerly known as Blanchard's Coffee. At this hidden gem you can find salted caramels, white ginger truffles or cranberry vodka cordials (we think you should try all three). The homemade marshmallow is heavenly, and the chocolate-dipped s'more bars are sublime.

The ever-friendly Kelly makes her confections by hand, having learned the craft from her grandmother as part of what she describes as her "chocolate-dipped" family tree. She says with a smile, "I feel so lucky. Every day I get to make something that makes people happy. This is the best job in the world!" In fact, you and your chocoholic friends can even watch her mixing and dipping her unique concoctions. She sells online and also delivers her lovelies around town for an added personal touch. In addition, you can find her distinctive flavors at the Wine Cellar, Ellwood Thompson's, Once Upon a Vine South and Vino Market.

## CHOCOLATES BY KELLY

5047 Forest Hill Avenue  
814-5496|ChocolatesbyKelly.com

THIS PAGE: Marshmallow s'mores from Chocolates by Kelly. A handmade marshmallow is sandwiched between graham crackers and then given a dunk in milk chocolate. OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Sweet Spot offers over 180 bulk items, including an entire section devoted to nothing but chocolate. BOTTOM: Handmade award-winning chocolates by Chocolat Artisan Confections are also available at Sweet Spot. Varieties pictured here include Gianduja, pomegranate, peanut butter and dark chocolate raspberry lemonade.



**G**earharts offers an upscale adult chocolate experience. Located at Libbie and Grove (and headquartered in Charlottesville), owner Tim Gearhart makes his chocolates from fresh local ingredients with no preservatives or additives, as well as with sweet cream and pure butter. (The chocolates contain no peanuts and are all gluten-free except one.) Even the mint is fresh in Gearhart's mint julep creation. Gearhart dips his fillings into a Venezuelan chocolate made from the Criollo bean, legendary among connoisseurs for having the finest flavor and aroma. His concoctions are also beautiful pieces of artwork that come in flavors like raspberry zin, pistachio toffee orange and tequila lime to name a few.

## GEARHARTS FINE CHOCOLATES

306 Libbie Avenue  
282-1822 | GearhartsChocolates.co

Gearhart says, "We are very appreciative to the local community for a great first year in Richmond and look forward to being of service for many years to come."

Online ordering has grown to be a huge part of the business, so Gearhart now ships his chocolates all over the country year round. He is also a wholesaler, and his magnificent creations can be found at Ellwood Thompson's, Whole Foods and Fresh Market as well as at various gift shops and wineries in the area.



TOP: Assorted chocolates including Earl Grey, pistachio toffee orange, Maya, mint julep, and tequila lime.  
BOTTOM: 2.5 ounce bars of pure Venezuelan single-bean dark chocolate in Criolla, ginger, espresso and Maya flavors.