

What Valley Baristas Are Drinking This Fall

Written by Alyssa DeMember



Snuggling up with a big crochet blanket and a warm cuppa (near a fireplace, if you're lucky enough to have one)—this is what fall is all about. Autumn is a vibrant season full of good vibes, allspice, nutmeg, and the inviting scent of a fresh brew of coffee drifting through the room on a chilly morning. We chatted with baristas from four local coffee shops around the Valley to get their take on the best autumn-inspired coffee, tea and other drinks. So grab your favorite mug, light some candles and get cozy.

King Coffee, Tempe

Warm cookies mean fall is here

For those who are vegan or can't have dairy, Alexis Lanterman of [King Coffee](#) in Tempe has a few alternatives still certain to evoke the idyllic, cuddle-up-by-a-fireplace comfort of the autumnal time of year.

King Coffee feels as though you've stepped into a close friend's home in the countryside—big windows let sunlight flow into the shop, and beige burlap curtains lay gently over the corners, softly muffling the harshness of the Arizona sun. The walls are set with bricks and the front door is a pastel mint green with a little bell in the top corner, signifying the arrival of new customers. The music is soothing and subdued, with soft piano and gentle string instruments.

Lanterman's favorite drink to whip up for the fall season is a cinnamon coconut milk chai latté. The key, she says, is steaming the milk with the cinnamon so the spice disperses evenly throughout the drink, rather than “choking you with a bunch of cinnamon sitting at the top.”

“That taste of cinnamon reminds me of fall and eating Christmas cookies,” Lanterman says. “Once I start eating warm cookies, I know it's fall.” And although this leans more toward the realm of the winter season, the King Coffee barista says she also adores coconut milk peppermint cinnamon lattés. To make this drink, Lanterman says she adds just one pump of peppermint syrup so it's not too sweet.



Altitude Coffee Lab, Scottsdale

Keeping it simple

[Altitude Coffee Lab](#) is a blend of comfort and sophistication. With pristine white-tiled floors, a grand piano, rustic wooden tables and a charming patio offering delightful views of Marguerite Lake in McCormick Ranch, this local Scottsdale coffee shop has exquisite lattés and cappuccinos. For Altitude, simplicity in creating fantastic coffee drinks is paramount.

Barista Shaylee Draper loves to make herself a black coffee using the V60, a partial immersion brewing method that creates a more balanced and flavorful cup, she says. Best used for light roasts, Draper says during the fall she enjoys Altitude's El Salvador blend, which has a sweet flavor with a nutty, toffee finish. Then she likes to add the classic cinnamon, pumpkin spice and nutmeg combination for that extra seasonal punch. For those who like dairy or want to tone down the intensity a bit, add a splash of cream or whole milk.

Echo Coffee, Scottsdale

Hot and bothered

Schuyler Kennedy, a barista at [Echo Coffee](#), says one of his favorite seasonal libations is a hot toddy made with apple cider. “It's real nice on a cool fall or winter night,” he says.

A micro coffee roaster serving local, organic products, Echo Coffee has a convivial coffee shop atmosphere with soft, olive green walls, and strips of burlap adorning the walls. While wooden tables are set throughout the center of the shop, toward the back are big brown leather

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couches with large burlap sacks full of coffee beans. Nearly floor-to-ceiling windows let a warm glow of natural light into the room.

To make a good hot toddy, Kennedy starts by bringing the apple cider to a boil and adding nutmeg, clove and cinnamon. Orange peel is a nice additional as well, he adds. Bring the mixture down to low heat and let it simmer for a few minutes, filling the home with robust scents of fruit and spice. "It makes the home smell nice, like cheap incense," Kennedy says. After turning off the heat, he then adds the whiskey and lets it simmer in the hot liquid for a few minutes. This brings out the natural sugars in the liquor and slightly mellows out the alcohol, Kennedy says. "But don't burn all the alcohol away--that takes the fun out of it."



Songbird Coffee & Tea House, Phoenix

Spice it up

[Songbird Coffee & Tea](#) is a little local coffee shop in Downtown Phoenix that feels like a wonderful hidden gem one might stumble upon spontaneously. Wooden park benches decorate a grassy front lawn with a green pastel porch swing hanging on chains from a white-slatted ceiling. That same grassy green trim lines each of the windows from the outside, while the inside of the shop has more soft white and brown tones marking the perimeters of the windows and doors. Along with slabs of wood for bar-style seating, Songbird has table seating along the walls with bright, shiny green cushions. Directly across from them is a brick fireplace with five or six large candles in the center of the hearth. A simple latté and a blueberry scone that tastes similar to a cinnamon oatmeal cookie complete the blissful scene. Songbird sources its coffees and teas from Cortez Coffee Roasters in Tempe and Maya Tea Company in Tucson, respectively.

Barista Eric Almero says he could talk about coffee for days. One of his favorite fall drinks, in addition to a simple spiced apple cider, is a dirty chai latté with a hint of cayenne pepper. Paired with Songbird's spicy chai blend, the pinch of cayenne pepper adds an extra kick for a "hot and throaty" drink, perfect for a crisp night, says Almero. For those interested in this fiery twist on a dirty chai, first mix the chai powder into the espresso and add a sprinkle of cayenne after that. Then, add the steamed milk and enjoy fully.

"This is one of the only times of year we really get to enjoy hot drinks in Arizona," Almero says.

Sometimes the best way to treat yourself is to truly indulge in a toasty, robust drink that fills you up with a glowing warmth from head to toe. After all, that comforting, bubbly feeling is what autumn is all about.