

What Goes In the Cup: Milks, Creams and Flavors

What each one is, what it does to the coffee, whether it needs a cooler, and what it costs. Food-service prices, October 2026.

COFFEE REFERENCE CARD

Add-in	What it is	What it does in the cup	Needs cold?	Brands and price	Use it when, and what to watch for
DAIRY					
Whole milk	At least 3.25% milkfat	Lightens and thins; softens acidity	Yes: 41 °F or below	Any; buy pasteurized Grade A	A customer asks for milk. Cools a small cup quickly.
Half-and-half	10.5–18% milkfat	Body without much dilution; three times the fat of milk per splash	Yes, unless in sealed shelf-stable cups	Shelf-stable single-serve cups, about 6¢ each	The standard "cream" for hot coffee. Shelf-stable cups are short-dated.
Heavy cream	At least 36% milkfat	The most body in the least volume; cools the cup least	Yes	about \$5 a quart	A rich drink; whipped topping. A little goes far.
Evaporated milk	Unsweetened milk with 60% of the water removed	Creamy, slightly cooked taste; body of half-and-half	Not until opened	about \$1.30–\$1.50 a 12 oz can	A stall with no refrigerator; strong dark coffee. Cold once opened.
Sweetened condensed milk	Concentrated milk with sugar; at least 8% milkfat	Sweetens and thickens in one spoonful	Not until opened	about \$2.90 a 14 oz can	Phin coffee; cà phê sữa đá; egg coffee. "Filled milk" or "creamer" on the can means vegetable oil, not milkfat.
PLANT MILKS					
Oat milk, barista edition	Oats and water with added oil and a phosphate salt	Creamy, neutral, a little sweet; holds together in hot coffee	Not until opened (shelf-stable cartons)	Oatly Barista \$3.33; Califia \$3.54; Planet Oat \$3.67; Pacific, Chobani \$4.00 (32 oz)	The default non-dairy milk. Use opened cartons within 7–10 days, cold.
Soy milk	Soybeans and water	Fuller, beany; the most protein	Not until opened, if shelf-stable	Pacific Barista Soy \$3.79; Silk unsweetened \$3.42 (32 oz)	A customer asks for soy. Curdles in hot, acidic coffee unless it is a barista edition.
Almond milk, barista edition	Almonds and water with gums and citrates	Thin, nutty	Not until opened	Almond Breeze Barista \$3.42; Califia \$3.62 (32 oz)	Requested; iced drinks. Tree-nut allergen. Thinner than oat.
FLAVORS					
Honey, as honey syrup	Honey thinned 3 : 1 with warm water	Sweetens with the flavor of the honey; mixes cold	Mix on the day; keep spare cold	The stall's own	Any drink; iced drinks especially. Neat honey will not mix into a cold drink.
Milk and honey, premixed	Milk with honey syrup stirred in	A quick pour for a sweet, milky coffee	Yes: it keeps like milk, not like honey	Made at the stall	A busy market and a set menu drink. Make only a day's worth.
Vanilla	Extract: vanilla in 35% alcohol. Syrup: sugar and vanilla.	Extract flavors without sweetening; syrup does both	No	Extract about 13¢ per mL; syrups \$7.50–\$9 a litre	A few drops of extract in honey syrup. Imitation is plain vanillin.
Cinnamon, cardamom	Ground spice	Aroma; cardamom is the classic in Arabic coffee	No	Ground cinnamon about \$5 a lb	Steeped in a syrup, or ground with the beans. Powder floats or settles; it does not dissolve.

- **Why plant milk curdles:** heat and acid make its protein clump. Barista editions add a buffering salt and oil. Otherwise pour the milk first and add the coffee slowly.
- **No refrigerator?** Open with sealed shelf-stable items: single-serve creamers, a carton of barista oat milk, canned milks. Once opened, everything goes in the cooler at 41 °F or below.
- **One opened 32 oz carton is 16 two-ounce splashes,** about 21–25¢ each.