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DINING & WINE

Red Velvet Cake: From Gimmick to American Classic

In the pantheon of food-related shark jumps, red velvet cake body mist may well be the greatest leap of all.

Red velvet cake, once a reasonably tender, softly flavored culinary gimmick, has become a national commercial obsession, its cocoa undertones and cream-cheese tang recreated in chemical flavor laboratories and infused into all manner of places cake should not exist.

One can buy a red velvet scented candle, red velvet protein powder, red velvet air fresheners and red velvet vodka.

Even in the world of actual food, red velvet has taken over like so much kudzu.



Pamela Moxley, the pastry chef at Miller Union in Atlanta, has perfected a beet red velvet cake.
Dustin Chambers for The New York Times

[editorial]



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Ms. Moxley's beet red velvet cake, topped with a beet chip.
Dustin Chambers for The New York Times

But red velvet, like a species that adapts to a new environment, endures. In the age of allergies, agriculture and artisan food, some chefs have taken on a renewed effort to rid the cake of its food coloring.

One is Pamela Moxley, the pastry chef at Miller Union in Atlanta, who has perfected a beet red velvet cake. She uses a lot of acid to keep the color bright and balance the taste of roasted beet.

In homage to beet and goat cheese salad, she tops the cake with a mixture of goat cheese and cream cheese, and serves it with tiny beet chips and tarragon ice cream.