



Tired of getting your o's and a's confused? It might seem like a simple spelling mistake, but cocoa and cacao are actually two different products.

Cocoa vs Cacao: What is the difference?

Yes, they both add delicious chocolate flavours to your food, but they can be used in different ways, have intricate individual tasting notes and vary in cost. Understanding what they are and how they can both be used will help you on the way to becoming a chocolate expert.

What is cacao?

Cacao is chocolate at its most pure – straight out the pod, right from the bean, unroasted and relatively unprocessed. Cacao products come in many forms, from powders to nibs/chips and pastes, and all are free from any added sugar or milk.

Because of its raw quality, cacao has more of a bitter taste than processed cocoa or chocolate, and has been said to contain a whole lot more nutritional value than the sweeter alternatives.

What is cocoa?

Here is where things can get a little bit confusing: cocoa comes from cacao. At its most basic, cocoa is simply cacao after it's been roasted. Yes, all the forms of processed cocoa or chocolate that we know and love are simply made by roasting cacao beans at very high temperatures.

But it's not just the cooking process that differentiates the two. Most store-bought cocoa is also made with added sugar and milk to make it sweeter. Dutch-processed cocoa or dark cocoa is even processed with an alkaline solution to make it less acidic and far richer in its flavours.

How can they both be used?

While the source product is the same, cacao and cocoa offer very different flavour profiles and react in unique ways to different ingredients when baking. So, some recipes may call for one or the other depending on the flavour you wish to achieve, while others will require a few added ingredients or steps to make each option work. For example, cocoa and cacao powders can be used interchangeably with just the flavour being affected, but it is not recommended that you replace chocolate chips with cacao nibs in your baking.

Other than that, especially in powder form, cacao and cocoa can be used fairly interchangeably. You may simply find that the raw cacao powder has a richer, more chocolatey and slightly more bitter flavour, while processed cocoa powder can be a little bit sweeter.

So, should I be using cocoa powder or cacao powder?

That is entirely up to you. While cacao powder can be more expensive than cocoa powder, you will ideally be buying a higher quality version of your chosen chocolate powder with limited additional ingredients to preserve the natural flavours.

After that, your best bet might be to conduct some of your own taste experiments to see which of the flavours you prefer. A couple of days spent making lots of chocolate desserts? Sounds like a dream.