

Just make mine 'regular'

I love a good cup of coffee. I'm not a slave to it—one good cup in the morning is all I need to get the day going.

Some days, I use my drip maker and get a reasonably good cuppa Joe out of the process. Other days, I splurge a bit and use my stove-top Italian espresso maker to produce an exceptional cup of cappuccino. On those days, I hand whisk hot milk until it's foamy and top it all off with a shake or two of cinnamon.

It takes about three minutes longer to make myself a cappuccino than it does to make plain old drip coffee, but for some reason, I save cappuccino only for "special occasions," like Thursdays.

I always buy good quality ground coffee, but never whole beans—who has time for that? Through years of trial and error, I have discovered that good, old-fashioned Eight O'Clock coffee, which is about two-thirds the price of higher-end brands like Starbucks, is my favorite.

When I was a kid, my grandfather was a great lover of his morning coffee. A guy who enjoyed simple pleasures, he would call me over just in time to watch the coffee bubble up in the tiny glass globe atop the percolator. He even had a little happy dance he did when the coffee started perking. Perhaps that's how we got the term to "perk up." There was some real skill involved in making percolated coffee. Measuring and timing had to be perfect. You actually had to stand around the stove so that when the liquid hit the perfect shade of reddish-brown, you could quickly pull the pot off the heat to stop the process.

He and my grandmother bought Eight O'Clock coffee at the nearby A&P store. For those below a certain age, A&P was a large grocery chain begun in 1859 by George Huntington Hartford, the grandfather of Nuala Pell, wife of Sen. Claiborne Pell, for whom the Newport Bridge is named.

There aren't any A&P's in Rhode Island now, but the chain merged with Pathmark some years ago and they still have stores in six states. The A&P



Flotsam and Jetsam

By Donna Drago

was a tiny store in comparison to today's supermarkets. They had three check-out stands and there were no automatic conveyor belts. You simply pushed items closer to the cashier. They had basic foods for simple people—no kiwis, no extra virgin olive oil, no duck. Bananas, Crisco and chicken parts were all you were going to get. I loved going shopping with my grandparents. They always bought exactly the same things and one of them was coffee. The Eight O'Clock coffee display included a big hopper full of beans next to a large, noisy, bright red grinder. In those days, you could buy a full bag, a half bag—any amount—it was sold by the pound. You put the bag under the grinder, adjusted the grind to "perk," put the beans in the top and then hit the red button. The best part of this whole process was the smell. To this day, nothing smells better to me than sticking my nose in a newly-opened bag of coffee.

There are still automated coffee grinders in today's supermarkets, but in those days there were only one or two coffee choices—no Jack Daniels or Snickerdoodles blends—and the whole process seemed more primal. There were always coffee beans all over the floor and you could feel them under your shoes—like the Princess and the Pea—as you walked away.

Coffee purists will argue that ground coffee loses its flavor very quickly and everyone should be buying whole beans, but I store

my coffee in a zipper bag in the freezer and it tastes just fine for a couple of weeks.

Despite all the modern conveniences, there are people who make lousy coffee. I'm not sure how it's possible to mess it up, but I've had flavorless, bitter and repulsive brews in homes and restaurants. I'm always surprised when I get a lousy cup of coffee and I always throw it out after the first sip (unless I'm someone's dinner guest), because no matter how much milk, cream or sugar I put in, I know that you cannot improve upon bad or old coffee.

Ordering a cup of coffee while traveling can be a challenge. In Rhode Island, at places like Dunkin' Donuts, I order my coffee "regular," which means with cream and sugar. I tried that once in San Francisco and the counter clerk laughed at me. "What's regular?" Apparently regular is relative to a region.

In Italy, you must be very specific when ordering coffee. Comparable to the filtered brew we drink here is the Caffé Americano, or Caffé Lungo. If you just order a caffè, you'll get a tiny cup of espresso—nothing added. Everyone knows what a cappuccino is, but how about a Caffé Macchiato, or Caffé Ristretto? Macchiato is espresso, "stained" with a tiny dollop of steamed milk. Ristretto is very thick, concentrated espresso—the water is "restricted." Caffé corretto is "corrected" by the addition of a shot of anisette or other liqueur (Italians know how to start their day!) Caffé Doppio is a double espresso, and so on. In this country, Starbucks got everyone ordering coffee in long, wordy streams like "venti decaf skinny cinnamon dolce latte," or "grande peppermint white chocolate mocha." No thanks.

I like the basics. In Rhode Island, it's a "regular," in Italy, it's a cappuccino, and at home, it's plain old Eight O'Clock.



Good helpers

Emily Van Gelder, back left, Linda, Felicia, front left, and Olivia Faria helped plant beach grass as part of a dune restoration project at Mackerel Cove on Saturday morning.

Photo by Vic Richardson

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