



As for trendy alternatives to cupcakes, Kathol has found that her corporate and special occasion clients ask for a wide selection of treats at their functions to accommodate guests who may not appreciate the sweetness of cupcakes. She's had a lot of success with pie-based treats, namely cupcake pies (tiny pies baked in a cupcake wrapper) and pie pops on a stick, an alternative to the cake pops that she also makes on special order.

Cream Puffs

Bliss also sells cream puffs out of their Bow Valley Square store, but the mother of all cream puff shops in Calgary has to be Crufts, located on 4th Street SW, as well as in Calgary Farmers' Market. Cream puffs have a lot in common with cupcakes in that they're fussy enough that many home bakers don't want to deal with the hassle of making and assembling the pastries themselves. Crufts takes the plain vanilla cream puff that many of us already know, and elevates it to a dessert worthy of a special event or even a wedding.

"When people think about cream puffs, they usually think about frozen cream puffs they get from the grocery store," says Crufts manager Mario Adiwibawa. "So when they come in they don't know how it works, that these are gourmet custom-made cream puffs."

Whether you're attempting them at home or buying from Crufts, cream puffs are surprisingly diverse. Crufts offers a variety of fillings including classic Chantilly cream, hazelnut chocolate, salted caramel, Bailey's, green tea, and various fruit flavours, as well as fun and fancy toppings. For special occasions, the shop sells croquembouche cream puff towers and other cream puff arrangements.

Doughnuts

While doughnuts aren't usually considered a particularly elegant pastry, they are making a comeback among those with discerning taste. Jelly Modern Doughnuts is leading the doughnut charge in Calgary with gourmet flavours like maple bacon and Madagascar bourbon vanilla, but even chains like Krispy Kreme and Tim Horton's are upping their game with special seasonal doughnut flavours. Doughnuts aren't just for the convenience food set - plenty of home bakers and food bloggers are making them at home. If you're not

a stickler for tradition, you can bake them in the oven instead of deep-frying. And yes, they can replace cupcakes even for special occasions — Jelly Modern takes special orders for wedding cakes and centerpieces.

Macarons

The dessert most likely to take on cupcake-level of trendiness has to be French macarons. Not to be confused with coconut macaroons, macarons are delicate cookies made with almond meringue. Because the key ingredients are almond flour and eggs, classic macarons are gluten-free, making them an ideal cupcake alternative for those with food intolerances. With their growing popularity, macarons are now available at several bake shops in Calgary, though Yann Blanchard of Yann's Haute Patisserie says that Calgarians are still figuring out exactly what macarons are all about.

"People have this belief that macarons need to be fresh. Which is insulting to me, because there's no such thing as a fresh macaron!" Blanchard says. "We make sure our macarons are of the best quality, but a macaron cannot be fresh, it needs to be put into refrigeration after baking for at least 24 hours. The filling and humidity from the environment needs to transfer to the shell."

Part of macarons' appeal lies in the diversity of flavours as well as their dainty, yet colourful appearance. Yann's offers a rotating roster of macaron flavors like orange blossom and Grand Marnier, rose and lychee, and passion fruit, and Blanchard is always experimenting with new combinations including past special flavours like banana and avocado, and lime and basil. Macarons have become a staple at elegant weddings, either in the form of a macaron tower or as take-home favours.

The world can never have too many delicious desserts and it's not likely that the cupcake will lose its popularity any time soon. But with so many choices available (and this is without even mentioning whoopee pies, dessert sushi, artisanal marshmallows, cookie dough bites, or the plethora of other cute desserts out there), there's no reason not to try another option next time you're planning to indulge your sweet tooth.

