

Fairchild Will Host Its 14th-Annual Chocolate Garden This Weekend



Chocoholics, rejoice! The tempting aroma and colors of your favorite food will take over Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden this weekend, when the destination hosts the 14th edition of its annual chocolate extravaganza.

Formerly known as the International Chocolate Festival, the celebration will be held this Friday, January 24, through Sunday, January 26, with new vendors and a fresh take on the event, giving visitors a chance to stroll through the lush, 83-acre garden and enjoy a weekend of tasty treats and fun activations.

According to Heidi Ladell, chief experience officer for Fairchild, 8,000 people visited the expansive property last year for the chocolate fest. Some new additions – including a chocolate lab, a milkshake shope, and a cinema au chocolat – are expected to increase the guest count to 12,000 for this year's edition.

"Chocolate is very unique in that everyone has a relationship with it. It's one of those foods people can be very passionate about," Ladell says. "This event appeals to all sectors of the population and offers a great opportunity for people to come in and experience the garden and everything else that's happening within it."

The three-day fest will host Fête du Chocolat, an exclusive three-course seated dinner with Foley wines and chocolate pairings this Friday 4 at 7:30 p.m. (\$185 a person), followed by the After Dark Speakeasy, offering cocktails and small bites by Michael Schwartz's Tigertail + Mary (\$50 additional).

The main event occurs Friday through Sunday, when the garden will house an artisan village and food hall featuring chefs, chocolatiers, and 85 vendors – including Cinnamon Horn Rolls, Oh My Gosh Brigadeiros, and Club ChoKolate – selling and sampling chocolate in various forms, from hot cocoa and artisan truffles to ice cream.

Also new to this year's iteration are "Cupcakes and Cocktails" sessions, hosted by Misha's Cupcakes and Samson & Surrey, where guests can enjoy pairings of sweets and spirits at the mixology lab (\$10 per person). There will also be chocolate spin art and face painting, a Coco Joe's chocolate adventure, and chocolate lollipop-making for children.

Beer lovers can refresh with suds from three local breweries appearing at the festival. Concrete Beach, Wynwood Brewing, and the Tank will pour beers that pair well with chocolate.

Allen Susser will be one of the Miami chefs sharing tips and recipes at the Garden Kitchen, where he will present his "Chocolate and Spice and Everything Caribbean" demonstration. Chef Adrienne Calvo will share a chocolate chipotle churrasco recipe, and **Ellen Kanner** will lead guests through the session "La Dolce Vita – Italy's Secret Way with Chocolate."

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This Saturday, kids can participate in a junior chocolate-baking championship, and Sunday will see a pudding-eating contest. Visitors can also learn how to become a more

discerning taster and about chocolate's health benefits and other uses during the weekend's lecture series "Chocolate Can Talk."

Celebrating its 81st anniversary, Fairchild is a nonprofit organization that reaches more than 300,000 schoolchildren each year through programs such as the Fairchild Challenge, the Million Orchid Project, Growing Beyond Earth, and the program BioTech High School. Besides the Chocolate Garden, the outdoor venue also hosts yearly mango and orchid festivals, along with art exhibitions, concerts, and plant sales.

Attendees can take walking tours of the property, including a visit to its butterfly conservatory, rainforest area with 30 growing cacao trees, and tropical fruit pavilion, where cacao is harvested.

Chocolate Garden. *Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, 10901 Old Cutler Rd., Coral Gables; 305-667-1651; fairchildgarden.org. 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Friday, January 24, through Sunday, January 26. Admission is \$25 for adults, \$18 for seniors aged 65 and up, \$12 for children aged 6 to 17, and free for Fairchild members and children aged 5 or younger.*