

Oxford Australia Word of the Month

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mugacino – ‘a cappuccino served in a mug’

Australian Oxford Dictionary

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mugacino

The story behind the Word of the Month

On 22 July 2008 the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that while most restaurants have menus that list such coffee drinks as 'lattes, **mugacino**, cappuccino, espresso macchiato', the 'poor tea drinker will be lucky if there are one or two teas listed'. On 24 December 2007, the *Melbourne Age* saw the **mugacino** as less than flash: 'The next time you're forcing your way through a "mugachino" at some soulless shopping centre coffee shop, remember it doesn't have to be that way.' Back in 1997 the British linguist David Crystal commented on his interest in Australian coffee terms: 'he was struck by new words he heard in Brisbane—**mugaccinno** (cappuccino in a mug), mallowccinno (cappuccino with marshmallow)' (*Melbourne Age* 19 August).

The world of coffee terms often seems very complex or perhaps very pretentious. 'Mallowccinno' seems to be a fairly rare bird (especially with the spelling 'mallowccinno'), but 'mugacino', in all its spellings, is much more common: **mugacino**, *mugachino*, *mugaccinno*, *mugaccino*. It is now clear that **mugacino** is an Australian term.

The word **mugacino** is modelled on *cappuccino*, a type of coffee with a head of frothy milk. The word *cappuccino* in this sense first appeared in English in 1948, although its history in Italian is obviously much longer. It is the same word as *Capuchin* (in Italian *cappucino*), a member of an Order of Friars Minor, a branch of the Franciscans. The Italian form goes back to Italian *capuccio* or *capuche* meaning 'hood', and it is the long distinctive hood (or cowl) that is part of their

habit that generated the Capuchin's name (and in turn generated the term *Capuchin monkey*, 'an American monkey (*Cebus capucinus*) with black hair at the back of the head, looking something like a cowl'). Most dictionaries suggest that the colour of a cappuccino matches the colour of a Capuchin's habit, and that this is how the coffee term arose—although the greyish-brown colour of the Capuchin habit does not quite look like the colour of your ideal cappuccino.

The term *babycino* is now used worldwide as a kind of designer refreshment for young designer children—a cup of frothy milk sprinkled with chocolate. Are **mugacino** and *babycino* blends (mug + (*capp*)uccino, *baby* + (*cappuc*)cino), or has *-(a)cino* become a new combining form, that might in the future produce more compounds: *soyacino*, *lattecino*, etc.?

An unkind view of the Australian **mugacino** has it that it arose from a misunderstanding of the Italian *cappuccino*, which was interpreted ocker-wise as *cup-a-cino* or *cup-of-cino*. Once that misinterpretation was made, the way was open for the cup to be transformed into the larger mug!

Whatever the case, **mugacino** has established itself as an Australianism. The term was first recorded in 1994.