

Spray Cake! Cake in a can!

## Description



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Joanne Chang put a fork into a small cake and raised a bite to her mouth. The two Harvard students next to her watched anxiously. The cake was their invention, one they think could revolutionize the world, at least the world of cake. Chang is the chef behind Flour bakeries and a superstar of that world. To them, her opinion was crucial.

In a way, she had inspired their radical and novel way to make a cake, start to finish, in minutes.

It all started a little over a year ago, when John McCallum, one of the Harvard students, was sitting in the lab at his Science & Cooking class, trying to come up with ideas for his group's final project. As he puts it, they were spitballing a bunch of possibilities that all followed the same theme: "ways to eat more cake."

### Spray Cake Preroll Product Demo

Chang had appeared before the class earlier that semester and talked about the chemistry behind what makes cakes rise. As McCallum stared off into the distance, thinking about cake, he happened to notice someone spraying whipped cream from a can.

Thatâ€™s when the 20-year-old from Louisiana had his eureka moment: cake from a can. McCallum wondered if he could borrow the technology from the whipped cream can and create a similar delivery mechanism for cake batter, in which an accelerant releases air bubbles inside the batter, allowing the cake to rise without the need for baking soda and baking powder. To his surprise, it worked.

At first, McCallum, who will be entering his junior year (he had the idea as a freshman), was just happy to have come up with a clever idea for class. When he walked into the dining hall one day, carrying something wrapped in foil that he â€œmade in the lab,â€• his friends didnâ€™t show much interest in eating it. But Brooke Nowakowski, a 20-year-old classmate from Utah who would soon become his girlfriend, thought he was missing the potential.

â€œHe was just like, â€˜Cool. Lab project,â€™â€• Nowakowski said. â€œBut I thought it could go somewhere.â€•

The two perfected the recipe through trial and error in McCallumâ€™s dorm kitchen, and after searching high and low to be sure no one had done it before, they decided to take it to market. They are now in the process of patenting a product they call Spray Cake.

Chef Joanne Chang of Flour bakeries fame tested the creation of Harvard students John McCallum and Brooke Nowakowski, and the verdict was a thumbs up.

As they demonstrated the product in a Harvard dorm on Thursday, spraying the batter into a baking dish and a cup cake tray, they talked about the many benefits that come from making cake this way.

Number one: You can make it in the microwave. For a cupcake, it takes about 30 seconds and youâ€™re done. For a whole cake, it takes no more than a minute. And they say it has the same mouth feel as it does when cooked in a traditional oven (where, they say, it will cook much faster than a traditional batter because the batter has essentially already risen).

And Nowakowski, who seems to be the salesperson of the duo, likes to point out that it allows for better portion control. â€œYou can simply pull it off the shelf, make one cupcake, then put it back in the fridge and it wonâ€™t go bad.â€• Plus, there is nothing left to taunt you on the counter all night. McCallum and Nowakowski donâ€™t plan to take on the made-from-scratch bakery world; their product would go up against ready made cake mixes. Their goal, they say, is â€œtaking baking back.â€•

Theyâ€™re not going after the traditional made-from-scratch cakes â€œ and the satisfaction of that cooking process â€œ but instead are targeting the premade cake mixes.

The gimmick is intriguing, but the success of the idea will come down to taste. So with that in mind, the Globe arranged for McCallum and Nowakowski to bring Spray Cake to the woman who inspired it all. They were nervous as they walked into Myers + Chang, an Asian restaurant Chang owns in the South End. â€œI canâ€™t believe Joanne Chang is about to try our cake,â€• McCallum said. But Chang seemed pleased to meet students who had done something with one of her lectures. â€œIâ€™ve never had anyone experiment to this level, that Iâ€™m aware of,â€• she said, as McCallum and Nowakowski told her about the product, their target market, and the basics of how it was created.

McCallum produced two cans from his bag and filled two small dishes with what they call â€œZebra cakeâ€• â€œ half chocolate, half vanilla. (They say this is another added potential of their batter, which is

thicker due to the included bubbles, so it won't run together like traditional batter.) Chang took the cakes back to the kitchen, apologized that she didn't have the right oven or a microwave in the Asian restaurant, and returned about 15 minutes later with two cute little cakes.

Then, the moment of truth.

Chang took her bite and considered. As she did, she began to nod her head, slowly. Then it came: the thumbs up. The cake hadn't browned much " Chang blamed it on the fact that she didn't have a bakery oven " but as she took a few more bites, she seemed sold. "I'd add a little more salt, but that's just me," she said. The kids looked relieved, and as they got ready to leave, a group of women who were waiting to take a cooking class rushed up to congratulate them.

"You're going to be millionaires," one of the women said.

That's what they're hoping.

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