

Richmond is Fighting Over Rainbow Cookies



By [Sabrina Moreno](#)

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These colorful cookies — which Ukrop's produced over 13 million of last year — make regular appearances at birthday parties and have inspired shirts, art and popsicles. Photo: Sabrina Moreno/Axios

The results are in on the great [rainbow cookie debate](#) of 2026, and it turns out the biggest skeptics aren't transplants — they're Richmonders who grew up here.

Why it matters: Over 900 Axios Richmond reader responses show the split among longtime locals comes down to one thing: whether they experienced Ukrop's as a kid.

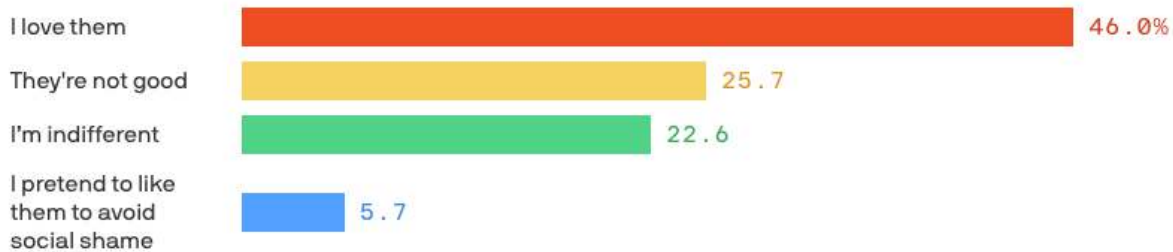
The backstory: The origins of the bite-sized cookies that have become part of our cultural DNA date back to Italian immigrants who made sponge cake in the Italian flag colors before the recipe evolved into cookies.

- Dot's Pastry Shop brought them to Carytown, then Ukrop's bought Dot's in 1976 and the free cookie tradition was born.
- Even after Ukrop's stores closed in 2010, Ukrop's Market Hall has kept the nostalgic pastime alive.
- "For us, it was never just about the free cookie," [Bobby Ukrop](#), CEO of Ukrop's Homestyle Foods, told Axios. "It was about what it represented: a moment to share."

The latest: Given the rainbow cookie's legendary status, we had to ask: What do readers *really* think about them?

Rainbow cookie opinions

From 919 Axios Richmond reader responses, May 19-21, 2026



Data: Axios Richmond survey; Chart: Sabrina Moreno/Axios

What we found: 74% who grew up going to Ukrop's love them, per an Axios review of the poll data.

- 66% who grew up here, but didn't go to Ukrop's, said they're not good.
- Those who moved here as adults were nearly evenly divided: About 30% love them, 30% are indifferent, and 33% dislike them.
- Transplants were also the most likely to admit they pretend to like them to avoid social shame (8%).

The intrigue: The question also sparked over a dozen reader responses to Axios that reveal even Richmonders who dislike the cookie have a soft spot for it.

- "Rainbow cookies are meh," wrote Annie T. "But I loved that my kids got a free cookie when we were shopping."
- "They really are only good if you take a sip and bite at the same time," said native Brandon J. "But what about pride in your homeland!!!"

Then there's Lauren D., who moved here in 2021, and loves them so much she exports them to her family in New Jersey (who now request them).

- One reader, John B., called rainbow cookies "the [Lil Sebastian](#) of Richmond food," referring to the beloved horse in "Parks and Recreation."

And: [Food & Wine](#) just named Gelati Celesti's rainbow cookie flavor the best in Virginia, saying it "tells the story of a destination in a way that few other foods or landmarks ever could."

Fun fact: Mayor Danny Avula, Henrico County Manager John Vithoulikas and Chesterfield County Administrator Joe Casey told Axios they're all fans, too.

The other side: Reader Delaney B. was less diplomatic: "RAINBOW COOKIES SUCK."

The bottom line: The secret ingredient was never in the cookie.