

All About **Vanilla Extract**

VANILLA is a member of the orchid family. Vanilla extract is a solution made by steeping vanilla pods in alcohol until the flavor is infused. There are many different types of vanilla beans and they can all be used to make vanilla extract. It's one of the most complex flavors in existence with more than 200 flavor compounds. Vanilla is a native of South and Central America and the Caribbean. It's believed that the first people to have cultivated the plant are the Totonacs of Mexico's east coast. Vanilla can be pollinated by the melipona bee only. This bee is found in the Central America. To duplicate the process in other parts of the world, flowers are hand pollinated by using a wooden needle.

Vanilla Extract contains manganese and potassium which both play an important role in brain function. Natural vanilla extract contains numerous antioxidants, including vanillic acid and vanillin. Antioxidants protect your body from damage from harmful components, such as free radicals and toxins. It is thought to be able to prevent and reverse skin damage caused by free radicals.



SELECTING AND STORING

- Choosing between pure vanilla extract and imitation vanilla flavorings is up to each individual's palate. However, it is often recommended to use pure vanilla in any dish that will not be baked.
- Vanilla extract is best stored at room temperature and out of direct sunlight. Kitchen cupboards are usually a great place to keep your vanilla extract, as long as it is not near a heat source.
- Pure vanilla extract that has no added sugar or corn syrup will last forever, aging like fine liquor.
- While dark colored glass bottles are the optimal container to store your extracts, remember the health and safety implications of choosing glass over plastic.

CULINARY USES

- Vanilla is a great enhancer of flavor. Whether a dish is "vanilla" flavored or not, it is considered an essential ingredient in many Western desserts, especially baked goods.
- The addition of vanilla extract can enhance vinaigrettes, sauces, and marinades.
- Most chocolate and chocolate-based recipes add vanilla extract, resulting in a light undertone that many people are used to.
- A few drops of pure vanilla extract can act as a sugar replacer in coffee.

INTERESTING FACTS

- Vanilla is the second most expensive spice in the world after saffron.
- Vanilla is the only fruit-bearing member of the orchid family.
- Vanilla is the most favorite ice cream flavor in the United States
- The definition of the word vanilla is "little pod" in Spanish.
- Vanilla extract is used to deodorize spaces such as microwaves. Veteran fishermen use it to mask the smell of their hands so the fish won't detect them.