

Vanilla Facts

Vanilla: The number one flavor asked for in ice cream. Three out of five people order ice cream over any other flavor. Vanilla is the only edible part of a vanilla orchid plant. These plants are grown in the same regions that chocolate and coffee is. Within the world, there are three major areas of the world that vanilla orchids are grown, each with a distinctive flavor and aroma.

Madagascar: For baking, by far the best. Anytime you are going to heat vanilla in your baking such as in a cake or custard, you will want to use this vanilla.

Mexico: Best used for the essences, such as perfumes and candles.

Tahiti: For non-baking, such as ice creams, Frostings and such. Tahitian vanilla beans tend to have a “flowery” aroma and taste.

Purchasing Vanilla Beans and Extracts:

First, only purchase fresh beans. Most grocery stores have two beans in a jar on the spice isle. The problem is that they do not have a high turnover of the beans and the costs are very high. If you want to see the person at the checkout give you a questionable look, purchase a jar of the beans! I suggest that you purchase your vanilla in a specialty spice shop or by mail. My favorites are The Spice House (www.thespicehouse.com) Penzey's Spices (www.penzeys.com)

How to use a Bean:

To use a bean, flatted it lengthwise. Cut down the length of the bean with a paring knife. Scrape the bean of the black seeds that I refer to as vanilla “dirt”. If you are making custard, you can place the “dirt” into the saucepan with the liquid. Place the pod into the pan also; you can remove the pod once you are finished.

Vanilla Extracts:

Pure vanilla extract: This is the purest of the vanilla flavorings. It was created in 1847, it is made by soaking vanilla beans in grain alcohol and water. USDA regulated that it must contain at least 35% alcohol.

Vanilla Flavoring: May contain less that 35% alcohol. It has a blend of pure and imitation vanilla.

Imitation Vanilla: Composed entirely of artificial flavorings, which most are byproducts of the paper-industry that are treated with chemicals

Vanillin: It is a flavoring that you will find in chocolate chips. Vanillin gives many people headaches. It is obtained either from vanilla or from various balsams and resins. It is a chemically a crystalline compound.