

COFFEE FLAVOUR GUIDE

Processing Terms

- **General:** The coffee fruit is similar to a cherry, with a skin, pulp, and a (double) pit. The skin and pulp have to be removed, and the seeds dried, so they can be shipped and roasted
- **Wet Processed or Washed:** The skin and pulp are removed by fermenting them quickly, and washing them off. This creates brighter, cleaner, and lighter bodied coffees.
- **Dry Processed or Natural:** The skin and pulp are allowed to dry over a week or so, they are then easily peeled off. This creates a heavier bodied, sweeter, more subdued coffee that can be tainted by ferment flavours.
- **Pulped Dry Process or Semi-washed:** The skin is washed off, but the pulp is allowed to dry on the bean over 24 to 48 hours. This creates an intermediate between dry and wet process coffee.
- **Patio or Sun Drying:** After being depulped, the beans are dried on patios or platforms by the sun. This is considered preferable to kiln drying. Kiln drying is used when an overly humid climate can rot beans left to dry in the sun.

Coffee Species and Cultivars

- **Robusta:** a lowland coffee species originating in West Africa that has higher yields and greater pest resistance than traditional coffee. Mostly used in very inferior coffees due to its medicinal taste. Very carefully grown and processed Robustas are found in small proportions in some premium espresso blends to improve crema and body.
- **Arabica:** The traditional high grown coffee originating in Ethiopia. There are many varietals.
 - **Heirloom:** The coffee trees of Yemen and Ethiopia. More variable and genetically closer to wild coffee than other cultivars.
 - **Typica:** The standard cultivar used throughout the world, descended from the first coffee trees planted in Indonesia and the Americas by Europeans.
 - **Bourbon:** An American mutation of Typica used throughout Central and South America. Generally produces a more mellow cup than Typica
 - **Caturra, Catuai, Icatu, Mondo Novo:** High quality modern varietals derived from Bourbon, used in the Americas. Produce lighter bodied and more acidic coffees than Bourbons
 - **Kent:** A variant spread by British planters in Africa and India; derived from old stock Indian varieties planted during the Moghul Empire.

- **SL28 and SL34:** Hardy modern variants of Kent used in Kenya. Makes outstanding coffees.
- **Sumatra Typica:** A Typica variant used throughout Indonesia.
- **Maragogype:** A Peruvian varietal that produces huge beans. The cup is light and nutty. Grown in Central Americas as well.
- **Pacamara:** A recent Maragogype/Caturra cross that produces a still nutty, but brighter cup, than straight Maragogypes.
- **Inferior Cultivars:** Crosses between robusta and arabica created to increase yield. Catimor (Central America), Variedad Colombia (Colombia), and Ruirii 11 (Kenya) are infamous for their low quality.
- **Peaberry:** Not a varietal, but a condition where the two coffee seed halves fuse, forming one small spherical bean, rather than two flat faced ones. Some consider peaberries as more flavourful than regular beans. When forming a small but significant proportion in an otherwise regular lot of beans, they are a flaw; since they roast at higher speed, and may char. 100% peaberry selections can be of very high quality.

Typical Taste Characteristics By Coffee Region

- **Central America:**
 - **Mexico:** Oaxaca Pluma and Alta Pluma are light bodied with milk chocolate flavours, and an exceptional ability to carry the flavours into darker roasts. Some Chiapas coffees can also be very good.
 - **Guatemala**
 - **Antigua:** Spicy, smoky cups that can take darker roasts. Heavier bodied than most centrals
 - **Huehuetenango:** delicate, delightfully floral, and buttery
 - **Other:** Other regions in Guatemala produce some outstanding classic cup coffees.
 - **Costa Rica:**
 - **Terrazu:** Powerful and sweet citrus and nut flavours, heavier bodied than most centrals
 - **Other:** Some excellent classic cups come from other regions.
 - **Panama:** Panama coffees have an awesome reputation among professionals and are virtually unknown by the wider public. The quintessential classic cup coffee.

- **Nicaragua:** Milder in acidity than most centrals. Nicaraguan Bourbons can have a variety of middle flavours like pear or vanilla; and roast flavours reminiscent of pie crust or chocolate.
- **El Salvador:** Similar to Nicaragua. El Salvador is producing some pulped natural coffees that are suitable for espresso
- **South America**
 - **Colombia:** Medium bodied, medium acid coffees, some of very high quality. Mostly classic cup, but with occasional surprises.
 - **Brazil:** Creamy bodied, low acid coffees. Much Brazilian coffee is of poor quality, but some, used in premium espresso, are very fine. These are mild tasting, mostly with milk chocolate, cherry, and sassafras notes
 - **Peru:** Very high grown coffees. Poor samples are thin and sour; good ones are also acidic, but have the sweetness, body, and rich caramel roast tastes to balance.
 - **Bolivia:** A new area. Medium bodied coffees like Colombia, some very fine.
- **Islands**
 - **Jamaica, Blue Mountain:** When good, a quintessential classic cup, mellow and sweet.
 - **Hawaii, Kona:** Classic cup with fruit and vanilla flavours, sweet.
 - **Puerto Rico, Haiti, Cuba, and Santa Domingo:** The good coffees are smoky sweet with peat and molasses flavours. Highly prized by Italian blenders for espresso.
 - **St Helena and Galapagos:** Floral coffees from heirloom varieties reminiscent of Ethiopian Yergacheffe and washed Sidamos
 - **Australia:** Rejoining the coffee growing world after a long absence. Too early to tell how the quality will turn out.
- **East Africa/Arabia**
 - **Kenya:** A famous quip in the trade is that Kenya's come in three varieties: Citrus, Blackcurrant, and Horsehair. Great Kenya's will show the citrus and blackcurrant in a single cup, along with spice, sweetness, and some wineyness. We pass on the horsehair.
 - **Ethiopia**
 - **Harrar:** Famous for its blueberry notes. Also expect apricot, chocolate, leather, wineyness, and even gamey notes. These are dry process, complex cups, prized for espresso blends

- **Yergacheffe:** Famous for its potent floral aroma. Delicate citrus and green tea notes accompany the flowers. Great Yergacheffes also have balancing sweetness and middle fruit flavours.
 - **Other:** Other regions produce cups intermediate between the Harrar and Yergacheffe extremes. Quality can be very uneven; but well prepped lots can be spectacular.
 - **Tanzania, Rwanda and Zimbabwe:** Similar to Kenya's, but more understated in acidity and fruit. Frequently have cedar flavours.
 - **Yemen:** Dry process, similar to Harrar. The best ones are dizzyingly complex, and have an effect similar to well aged wine or brandy.
 - **Burundi and Uganda:** Lower acid, heavier bodied coffees with vanilla and chocolate roast tastes. In good years, they can taste like spectacular Java's but sadly, their quality is very uneven.
- **Indonesia**
 - **Java:** The first coffee growing area under European control; so the name has become synonymous with coffee. Good quality Java is a very low acid, very heavy bodied classic cup. Aged (old brown) Java has intense woody roast tastes, extremely heavy body, and almost no acidity.
 - **Sumatra**
 - **Mandheling:** A dry process, heavy bodied, low acid, sweet coffee with earthy, mushroomy flavours. The great ones have dark roast flavours somewhere between chocolate and molasses.
 - **Other:** Wet and semi-wet process coffees from Gayoland and Aceh have somewhat more acidity and fewer deep flavours. Good lots are sweet and plummy; poor lots somewhat dry and acerbic
 - **Sulawesi Toraja (formerly Celebes Kalossi):** A semi-wet processed coffee, classic cup like Java, but with more exotic spice and dark fruit flavours. Roast flavours tend towards chocolate.
 - **Papua New Guinea:** Fruitier and lighter bodied than Sulawesi's. Poor ones can taste like beef broth; good ones like pleasantly exotic classic cups.
 - **Bali:** Prized by the Japanese for its flawless processing and translucent emerald beans, hence expensive. Similar in its virtues and faults to Papua New Guinea

India: The first region outside Arabia to cultivate coffee. Indian coffees are very well processed. The highest grades are spicy and have hints of tropical fruit. Monsooned varieties (a form of aging) are very heavy bodied, have intense loamy and woody flavours, and are very low acid. Italian blenders use Indian coffees in preference to Indonesian ones as bases for espresso blends. Their use in the US is just beginning.