

How to Buy Vanilla extract

Supermarket, gourmet stores, specialty stores and many other outlets carry vanilla extract. There are also many web sites selling vanilla extracts. Some of the brands are very familiar since they had been around since our grandmothers or before. New vanilla extracts appear on the shelves almost weekly. Here are few important tips to help you chose the real vanilla extract. In the USA vanilla extract has a standard of identity as described by the FDA. There are only 2 species of vanilla that are allowed to be used in food: 1) *Vanilla planifolia* (growing in Madagascar, Mexico, India, Indonesia, Uganda and elsewhere) and 2) *Vanilla tahitensis* (growing mainly in Tahiti and Papua New Guinea). A product can be called vanilla extract only if it contains a minimum of 1 fold extract. A fold has to contain 13.35 OZ of properly cured vanilla beans, not more then 25% moisture, in 1 gallon of water and at least 35% alcohol. Vanilla extract in addition can contain sugar, glycerin and propylene glycol. This is a simple version.

- **Look for familiarity.** If the brand is known and you used it in the past, it is safe to use it again. Using a familiar brand does not necessarily provide you with the best Vanilla extract.
- **The ingredient list.** The ingredients have to be listed from highest to the lowest amount. The ingredients for a basic vanilla extract should appear in the following order: water, alcohol, vanilla bean extractives. If other
- permitted ingredients are added they should follow the same consistent order.
- **Vanillin.** Vanillin, a major flavor ingredient in vanilla extract, is not required to be listed on the label. If it is mentioned on the label, for example, 'double the intensity of vanillin', one should be suspicious of adulteration. Many vanilla extracts on the retail market today have vanillin, ethyl vanillin or other ingredients added. Many products labeled 'vanilla extract' actually contain little or no vanilla extract. They should carry a label stating Artificial vanilla.
- **Read the label.** If you can not read the script on the label or the list of ingredient or the attached story, do not buy.
- **Certification Symbols.** Symbols like Organic and Kashrut (Jewish law) are very important to look for. Organizations that issue these certifications are usually giving them to industrial set ups. A bottle with no certification is more likely had been bottled at home with out any supervision. For example, a vanilla extract bearing a Kosher certification contains Kosher beans, Kosher ingredients and was extracted and bottled under Kosher supervision in a Kosher approved facility. The same principle applies to Organic certification. .
- **Blending Vanilla Extract.** The law allows us to blend beans or extracts and we are not required to specify the origin of the beans. However when the origin is given on the bottle as 100% Madagascar bourbon, one should expect 100% Madagascar bourbon.
- **Single Origin.** Some bottles bear the statement 'Tahitian vanilla'. One expects that the extract is made from vanilla beans grown only in the island of Tahiti.
- **Tahitian Extract.** Beans from Tahiti command much higher price than beans from other origins. One expects, then, that the price of Tahitian vanilla extract will be higher. If you come across a bottle with a price comparable to vanilla extract from other origins be skeptical.
- **Papua New Guinea (PNG) Beans.** The vanilla beans grown in PNG and Tahiti are the same species, *Vanilla tahitensis*. However, while the Tahitian beans are costly

- those from PNG are affordable. Be careful not to pay for extract made with beans from PNG (although very nice extract) for the price of beans from Tahiti.
- **Specs.** Specs is another name for vanilla seeds. The seeds do not contain any flavor components, although many people associate the seed with flavors. On the other hand, seeds give a nice look to ice cream. The seeds in vanilla extract will precipitate to the bottom of the bottle since seeds are heavy. In the vanilla beans the seeds are in the interior (middle) of the bean and surrounded by special cells that produce vanillin and other flavors. This finding explains why many chefs believe the inside of the beans and particularly the seeds contain flavors. If one is looking for specs it is better to buy vanilla beans or ground vanilla beans.