

Becoming a Coffee Connoisseur: 101

A quick guideline to picking and brewing the perfect roast for your palate.

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Coffee: (n.) survival juice. Many people's day start and end with coffee. Coffee has become a huge part of many people's every day routine. We wake up and immediately want to be greeted by coffee. Black coffee, latte coffee, cappuccino, decaf, flavored coffee, iced coffee – the list goes on and on. But how does one figure out what their favorite cup of joe is? It all starts at the root of the coffee bean and asking yourself if that's a flavor your palate can agree with.

It's important to know where your favorite coffee comes from. Not just by country, but by store and brand too. We'll start with location first though. Coffees are categorized not only by their roast, but by their region or their place of origin as well. Some of the most renowned coffee flavors come from places like Colombia, Brazil, Indonesia, Vietnam and so on. Imported coffee is one of the largest consumer commodity in the world. Although there are many different types of beans, and also for the sake of this article, we'll focus on the two types of commercial beans: [Arabica and Robusta](#). Arabica beans are known mostly for the smooth and somewhat acidic or tangy taste whereas Robusta beans are known for the stronger and a bit more bitter taste.

So how do you determine what you like? It really comes down to two things: **taste and caffeine content.**

Taste

The way coffee is roasted or grinded affects the taste. Time and temperature determine a bean's type of roast and which class a coffee will fall into. The [National Coffee Association \(NCA\)](#) classifies coffee into four roasts:

1. **Light Roasts:** a light brown color with no oil on the surface of the bean due to them not being roasted long enough to extract the oil.
2. **Medium Roasts:** a medium brown color with a slightly stronger flavor but still no oil on the surface for the same reason as the light roast. The medium roast seems to be the most popular in the United States.
3. **Medium Dark Roasts:** a rich, dark color with some oil on the surface of the bean. The taste of a medium dark roast is typically bittersweet.
4. **Dark Roasts:** a dark color with a very shiny, oily surface of the bean. The taste of a dark roast is typically very bitter.

Unfortunately, there's no dating app to let you know which roast you'd pair up with the best. So the best test to figure out which roast fulfills your expectations is to go to Starbucks and try their house coffee. If you find your face cringing after that first sip, then you're most likely going to enjoy a lighter roast that has a smooth taste instead.

Caffeine Content

If you find yourself needing to hold your eyelids up on a Monday morning, pick a light roast coffee. You heard right. Contrary to belief, lighter roasts actually carry the most caffeine. The roasting process actually causes the beans to lose their caffeine. So will you get the same caffeine buzz from a cup of

McDonald's coffee compared to a Starbucks house brew? The answer is no. The Center for Science in the Public Interest reported that caffeine levels are different in all major popular brands and restaurant chains. Check out a chart [here](#) to see if your favorite brand is giving you the caffeine buzz that you want.

So now that you're on your way to becoming a coffee connoisseur, you're probably wondering now how to brew your beans. First, you need to know which bean to buy when shopping. There's nothing like wasting money on a bad bag of coffee. Think of buying coffee beans like buying bananas. You wouldn't buy bruised or brown bananas from the store, would you? *That's a rhetorical question.* There's a few things you need to be mindful when buying your bag of beans. Always check the **roast date**. Buy beans that have been roasted recently. Who was the **coffee roaster**? Just like buying any name brand item, coffee is no different. If you aren't aware of the already well-known brands, do your research on respected roasters before buying just anything. Once you've made your purchase, **store** your beans properly. As recommended by the National Coffee Association, store your beans in an opaque, air-tight container at room temperature for maintain the best quality. Keep them in a dark location, such as a cabinet or pantry that sit far enough away from an oven or any other appliance that may get warm or hot. It's also recommended that you purchase your coffee in small batches since coffee, just like any kind of produce or fruit, starts to lose its' freshness after being roasted. Exposing your beans to oxygen is also going to expedite the expiration of your beans. Try not to open your air tight bag or container as much as possible. If you buy a large batch of beans, sort out a smaller amount into another bag or container so that the entire batch doesn't expire early.

So you've bought your beans, now time to make the perfect cup of joe.

There are a variety of ways to make coffee, but some of the most popular ways to brew your beans include methods from drip coffee to French press to espresso to cold brew.

- Drip coffee is the most popular method in America for brewing coffee. As most know, the process is simply pouring hot water over ground coffee beans. Machines for drip coffee vary from ones that only require a filter to pour already grounded coffee in, or one that grinds fresh beans for you. The quality of coffee using the drip method definitely depends on the quality of equipment you use along with the quality of beans you've purchased.
- French press coffee is made by using a specific pot that has a beaker and a plunger. Just like the drip coffee method, it still requires pouring hot water over the grinds but instead you let it steep for a few minutes before pressing down the plunger to separate the grinds.
- Espresso is made by pushing hot water through a layer of compacted ground coffee. Unlike other popular brewing methods, espresso is very concentrated with a strong aroma and flavor.
- Cold brew is popular amongst those who aren't a fan of hot coffee. Cold brew is a little more extensive to make in terms of time and preparation. It's prepared by steeping coffee grinds for an extended period of time before straining it and then serving it. It usually takes anywhere between 12 and 36 hours to steep the grinds and is usually made in large batches due to the extensive labor.

I know what you're thinking. "I drink coffee every morning, who has the time for these methods?" If you're someone to hit the snooze button 5 times before rushing into the shower, this is why we live in a convenient world full of coffee shops on every corner. Some of [best coffee shops in the U.S.](#) are actually local coffee shops. Boxcar Coffee Roasters in Colorado, Panther Coffee in Florida, The Wormhole Coffee in Illinois, Caffe Pronto in Maryland, Satellite Coffee in New Mexico, Maialino in New York, Mission

Coffee Co. in Ohio, Elemental Coffee Roasters in Oklahoma, and Baked & Wired in Washington D.C. are just to name a few. If you don't live near a good local brew shop, some of the best chain coffee shops include Starbucks (it's Pumpkin Spice Latte season), Gloria Jean's Coffee, Caribou Coffee, and Dunkin' Donuts. But if you don't feel like spending on average around \$5 a day on coffee, you might want to consider buying a machine for your office. Make it a habit to brew your preferred cup of joe while checking your morning emails. Be sure to do your research on the best coffee machines as well. Don't buy a cheap machine that may break in a year. Believe it or not, the quality of the machine also has an impact on the coffee's level of quality. Depending on your brewing method preference, quality machines may cost a pretty penny, but they'll not only last you a long time and you'll enjoy a tasty cup of coffee too.

But is drinking coffee every day good for my health?

Well, if you're not a coffee drinker, you might want to think again about picking up the habit. A cup of coffee a day can keep the doctor away! [Studies](#) have shown that your cup of joe does more than just give you an energy jolt. The benefits that have been studied include:

- Preventing type 2 diabetes. Your brewed bean increases plasma levels to help prevent the development of type 2 diabetes. The Harvard School of Public Health found in a study that participants who increased their coffee intake by more than one cup a day over a 4-year time span lowered their type 2 diabetes risk by 11%.
- Preventing Parkinson's disease and also improving the movement of those who are already diagnosed. The caffeine from coffee is also associated with lowering the chances of getting Parkinson's disease. For those who are already diagnosed with Parkinson's, drinking coffee has been shown to help control movement due to the caffeine.
- Preventing liver disease. For those daily habitual coffee drinkers, you've already reduced your risk of death from liver cirrhosis. Studies have shown that drinking coffee is linked to preventing and reducing liver disease.
- Preventing liver cancer. Drinking three cups of coffee a day lowers the risk of developing liver cancer by 40%.

The brewed bean, whether you like it hot or cold, has also been found that in moderation it is good for your overall health as well. Drinking coffee helps protect against heart failure. Those who drink around eight ounces a day can lower their risk of heart failure by 11%. Who knew that enjoying your favorite drink can help you live longer and healthier.

But what about coffee and mental health as well? In an article published by Harvard Medical School, it says that drinking coffee is "associated with a lower risk of depression among women, a lower risk of lethal prostate cancer among men, and a lower risk of stroke among men and women." It has even been studied that it helps with ADHD and just focusing in general.

If you're a runner or into exercising, drinking coffee before a race or a work out helps boost your performance. According to a [Runner's World article](#), "hundreds of studies have shown that consuming caffeine before a physical challenge likely helps subjects go farther and faster than when they go without it." It has been studied that drinking coffee about an hour before you run or exercise is the best time for consumption. The presence and effects of caffeine not only helps keep you focused for your work out, but it also doesn't dehydrate you. Maybe your feeling exhausted after a rigorous work out or

run. In the same article from Runner's world, they state that one study conducted "had cyclists ride hard for two days in a row to put them in a glycogen-depleted state. Those who drank a recovery drink with carbs and caffeine rebuilt their glycogen stores by 66 percent more than those who drank only carbs." So if your training for your first half-marathon, or just looking to boost your daily workout routine, consider adding coffee into your diet as a performance enhancement.

So in the end, finding your perfect cup of joe is a personal experience from finding your favorite beans to brewing them just the way you like it. If you're not a regular coffee drinker already, finding your perfect cup and favorite flavor will most likely require a lot of trial and error. And if you are already a regular coffee drinker, expand your palate and try new brands or flavors you've never tried before. You might find something you like even more than your current favorite. Remember to consider all of the health benefits that come with coffee too. It's understandable that drinking coffee to some is an acquired taste, but with all the flavors out there, there's got to be a perfect match for everyone.

Before you run off to make to make a cup of coffee, *now that this has probably quenched your thirst*, I leave you with some fun facts about coffee:

- Did you know that coffee beans require a lot of water? And I mean, **a lot** of water. Just one pound of beans requires 2,500 gallons of water.
- Did you know that a coffee plant can live up to 200 years? When the bean starts to grow, it starts out small like every plant, but grows into a larger bushy plant and can live for two centuries.
- Did you know that the legend has it that coffee was originally discovered by a goat herder? The myth is that an Ethiopian goat herder by the name of Kaldi noticed his animals acting jitter and hyper after eating coffee beans.
- Did you know that roasters usually buy a year's worth of beans at a time? Apparently, most coffee growing countries only have one harvest time. Because of this, roasters buy in bulk and then store their beans in special storage to keep them fresh.
- Did you know that when judges taste coffee, they slurp it violently? Different parts of the mouth pick up different flavors; the tongue for sweetness and the back of the throat for bitterness. So in order to get the best and most accurate taste, judges have to slurp the coffee very loudly in the entirety of the mouth.
- Did you know that espresso actually doesn't really mean fast? The word derives from the Latin verb meaning "to press out." A lot of people mistakenly pronounce the word "Espresso", with an "x", thinking that the coffee is made quickly.
- Did you know that coffee loses about 70% of its flavor within two minutes? Slurp fast when your coffee is hot off the pot, otherwise it will go stale after 15 minutes.
- Did you know that roasters use a specific coffee flavor language while assessing the characteristics and defects of coffees? The Specialty Coffee Association of America created the flavor wheel to make it easier for roaster to describe flavors amongst themselves.
- Last, but certainly not least, did you know that coffee actually has more flavors than wine? There is currently an estimated of 1,500 flavors of coffee compared to wine, which has an estimated amount of 200 flavors.

If you want to learn more fun facts about coffee, you can find more by clicking [here](#). Now finally, off you go to enjoy your tasty, favorite, cup of joe. Enjoy!

Sources:

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