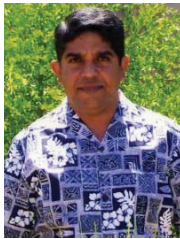


Botanical name: *Vanilla planifolia*  
Family: Orchidaceae (Orchid family)  
Other names: flat leaved vanilla, vaniliya (Bulgarian), vanilla (Danish), vanille (French), vanilla (hindi), banira (japan), vaniglia (Italy)

Vanilla is an orchid, form a flowering plant genus about 150 species in the orchid family. Vanilla is the only orchid that produces an edible fruit, the largest family of flowering plants in the world. Vanilla is arguably the

Mexico had the monopoly on growing vanilla, but now Madagascar grows the majority of the world's crop. Now it has spread to Costa Rica, Guatemala, Uganda, Turkey, Kenya, China, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Tahiti, Hawaii and other Pacific Islands.

Vanilla grows best under hot humid climate from sea level to an elevation of 1500m. The ideal growing conditions are moderate rainfall, 150-300 cm, evenly distributed through 10 months of the year. The optimum temperature for cultivation is 15-30°C during the day and 15-20°C during the night. Ideal humidity is around 80%. The soils for vanilla cultivation



**Dr. Lalith Gunasekera**  
Invasive Plant Scientist  
Melbourne - Australia



# VANILLA

**A PLANT PROVIDE THE MOST POPULAR FLAVOUR IN THE**



**FLOWERS**

world's most popular and sought after flavour. The sweet, fruity and floral characteristics coupled with the strong aroma, makes vanilla an outstanding flavour. Vanilla is the second most expensive spice after saffron due to the extensive labour required to grow the vanilla seed pods.

Vanilla was originated in South East Mexico and Guatemala. The "Totonaca" people of Mexico were the first people to domesticate vanilla. They continue to cultivate the fruit that they consider was given to them by the god. Vanilla first left Mexico in the early 1500's on ships bound for Spain. Until the late 19th century,



**Dried vanilla pods**

America.

Majority of the world's vanilla is the *Vanilla planifolia* variety, more commonly known as "Madagascar Bourbon".

Growing vanilla is extremely labour intensive a deli-

cate and inevitable expensive operation. Vanilla is a tropical, evergreen, leafy and somewhat fleshy vine, growing under a canopy of support trees. Stem can grow more than 35 m with alternative leaves spread along their length. The short, oblong dark green leaves of vanilla are thick and leathery. There are strong aerial roots grow from each node. Every year growers fold the higher parts of the plant downwards so that the plant stays at heights accessible by a standing human. This also stimulates flowering. It will take up to three years after the vine are planted before the first flower appear. The vanilla plant can produce up to 100 flowers on a single inflorescence but usually no more than 20. The flowers are quite large and attractive with white, green or cream colours. Most vanilla flowers have a sweet scent. Each flower opens up in the morning

and closes late in the afternoon on the same day and never re-open. If pollination has not occurred during that period, it will be shed. The flowers are self fertile but need pollinators to perform this task. The flowers can only be naturally pollinated by a specific "Melipona bee" found only in Mexico. But hand pollination is the most reliable method in commercially grown vanilla. Experienced pollinator can pollinate about 1000-2000 flowers in a day. This is labour intensive task.

**There are three types of vanilla**

1. *Vanilla planifolia* : grown on Madagascar, reunion and other tropical areas along the Indian Ocean
2. *Vanilla tahitensis*: grown in the South Pacific Countries
3. *Vanilla pompona* : found in the West Indies, Central and South

The distinctive flavoured compounds are found in the fruit which results from the pollination of the flower. One flower produces one fruit. The fruit is termed "vanilla bean" (Pod). The fruit is technically an elongate, fleshy and dehiscent capsule 10 -20 cm long. The vanilla grows quickly on the vine but not ready for harvest until

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**භිම චාරිකා Snow Tours**  
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