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maturity - approximately 9 months in order to completely develop their signature aroma. However when the beans are harvested, they are still partially green and therefore have neither flavour nor fragrance. They develop these distinctive properties during the curing and drying process. Each bean ripens at its own time, requiring a daily harvest for 3-4 weeks. To ensure the finest flavour from every bean, each individual pod must be picked by hand just as it splits. It is crucial that the vanilla bean



Vanilla Plant

not be harvested until it is yellow on the tip and is beginning to split on the end. If picked too green the bean will lack flavour and develop moulds that will eventually cause it to rot. The fruit left on the plant, will ripen and open at the end, as it dries, the phenolic compounds crystallize, giving the beans a diamond-dusted appearance. The fruit contains tiny, flavourless seeds.

Vanilla has 4 stages of production process.

1. Harvesting: The pods are harvested at correct time
2. "killing" or inactivation of vegetative tissue: immediately wrapped and exposed to high heat and humidity to arrest further growth. This can be done by direct sun drying, hot water blanching, oven heating or freezing
3. sweating/curing: pods are boiled and held at 45-600C for 7-10 days in cloth covered boxes/containers immediately after boiling. This allows enzymes to process the compound in the pods into vanillin and other compounds important to the ultimate vanilla flavour.
4. Drying/curing: The last phase is drying to prevent rotting and to lock the aroma in the vanilla beans. The beans are laid out in the sun during the mornings and returned to their boxes in the afternoon. This may take weeks. The cured vanilla beans have lost 60-70% of their moisture and will exhibit their fullest aromatic qualities.

Then pods are stored out and graded according to aroma, size and quality and particular market demands. Then they will rest for a month or two to finish developing their full flavour and fragrance. This process and manual pollination makes vanilla one of the most expensive spice in the world. Like other orchid's seeds, vanilla seed will not germinate without presence of certain fungi. Thus growers reproduce vanilla by cutting. Normally they remove sections of the vine with six or more leaf nodes, a root opposite each leaf. The two lower leaves are removed, and this area is buried in loose soil at the base of a support. The remaining upper roots will cling to the support, and often grow down into the soil. Rapid growth can be obtained under good conditions. An average of 2000 cuttings can be planted per hectare.

There are 3 main commercial preparations of natural vanilla

1. Whole pod
2. Powder (ground pods, kept pure or blended with sugar or starch)
3. Extract (in alcoholic or occasionally glycerol solution)

Vanilla is used for food flavouring in baked goods, sodas, candies, syrups, ice cream, soy milk and perfumes and added to most chocolate industries.

Vanilla has always been an expensive commodity and many attempts have been made to create substitutes and synthetics. In fact 95-97% of vanilla used as a flavour and fragrance is synthetic. A good synthetic duplicate of real vanilla simply does not exist. Most imitation vanillas contain "vanillin", only one of 171 identified aromatic components of the real vanilla beans. Vanillin can be produced synthetically from lignin. Most synthetic vanillin is a by product of the pulp and paper industry and is made from waste sulphate which contains lignin sulfonic acid.

World production of processed vanilla beans average between 2000 -2400 metric tons per year. Madagascar is the largest producer with 1000 - 1200 metric tons per year, followed by Indonesia at 350 metric tons per year. The USA consumes well over half the world's supply, followed by Europe, especially France. The dairy industry uses a large amount of the world's vanilla in ice creams, yought (fresh and frozen) and other flavoured dairy products. Despite all the wonderful ice cream choices available in the market place, vanilla is still the most favourite flavour.

A VESAK THOUGHT

*Ascending, Descending
High or low
Burning with anger
Craving with desire
Ego-centric, selfish*

*Cheating, misleading
Competing, fighting
Accumulating, claiming
Planning and plotting
Deceiving and killing*

*Panting and ranting
Passionate, lustful
Avaricious, envious, rapacious
Hovering and lingering
Repenting at last
In the whirlpool of life*

We the lesser beings

*Calm, composed
Compassionate, equanimous
Serene, tranquil, un-baffled
Detached*

You the Supreme One

*The refreshing breeze
A ray in the darkness
The drizzle in the drought
Oasis in the desert
Solace to the burning heart*

Redeem us!

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