

The best vanilla in the world (revealed)

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After saffron, vanilla is the second-most expensive spice in the world. It's celebrated for its fragrant, robust flavour that uplifts the humblest sweet and savoury dishes. Vanilla is the organic essence of the esteemed vanilla bean - which is derived from a flowering orchid plant that grows in hot and humid tropical regions.

The best vanilla depends on your taste preference and what you are baking or cooking. [Different vanilla beans exude different flavour](#), depending on where they are grown and how they are processed. It's not only climate and soil that sets vanilla beans apart but also each region's unique method of curing and drying the vanilla beans.

The original vanilla orchids that gave rise to the world's taste for the exotic spice originated from Mesoamerica, part of which falls into what is now Mexico. Since vanilla left Mexico in the early 1500s on ships bound for Spain, the esteemed vanilla bean is now grown in an array of countries in the tropical corners of the world.

At least 75% of vanilla beans found on the international markets today are harvested from vanilla plants of the *genus Planifolia* that originate from Madagascar and Réunion. The rest of the world's vanilla plants are harvested from the *genus Tahitiensis* that originate from Mexico and Tahiti.

Let's look at the world's best vanilla beans and their powerful flavour profile.

Madagascar gourmet vanilla beans

Flavour profile: Well-rounded rich, creamy-caramel tones.

More commonly known as Bourbon vanilla beans, this variety comes from a flowering orchid of the genus *Planifolia* that thrives on tropical islands in the Indian Ocean. At least 75% of vanilla beans found on the international markets today are derived from the genus *Planifolia*.

The term 'Bourbon vanilla' refers to the vanilla bean origin - which is this the Bourbon Islands, most commonly Madagascar but also Mauritius and Réunion. The name comes from the period when the island of Réunion (Île Bourbon) was ruled by the Bourbon kings of France and has no relation to Bourbon whisky.

Read more about [everyday uses of vanilla powder](#).

Grade A Bourbon vanilla beans are instantly recognisable as the thin and slender variety. They have thick, oily skin and contain an abundance of tiny seeds. The Bourbon bean easily releases a robust, creamy vanilla flavour and is used to flavour sweet and savoury dishes as well as beverages.

Papua New Guinea gourmet vanilla beans

Flavour profile: Floral undertones with a hint of cherry-chocolate, caramel and liquorice.

[Papua New Guinea \(PNG\) gourmet vanilla beans](#) are harvested from a flowering orchid of the genus *Tahitiensis*. Vanilla



tahitensis is a cross-over species of stock from Vanilla planifolia and Vanilla odorata. It's classified as a separate species and is notably different from Vanilla planifolia in both appearance and flavour.

Tahitian vanilla beans that are derived from the vanilla plant in Papua New Guinea are regarded as the 'best of the best' in the vanilla world. The bean is wider and flatter than the more common Bourbon beans and when cured, is fruity and floral on the nose. PNG's vanilla gives off notes of plum fruits and spice that you would find in a fine Viognier or Riesling wine.

Papua New Guinea vanilla beans contain less natural vanillin - which is the organic compound that releases the rich, fruity flavour and aroma. The unique flavour is suited to creamy desserts such as crème Brulee, vanilla pastry cream, ice-cream and custards.

The sweet, floral characteristics of Papua New Guinea's vanilla also make it suitable for the production of commercial perfumes, soaps and skincare lotions.

Mexican gourmet vanilla beans

Flavour profile: Bold, dark and smokey.

The original Mexican vanilla bean comes from the flowering orchid of the genus Planifolia. It has a smoother, more mellow flavour and imparts an exotic spicy, woody aroma.

The bold flavour and aroma profile of Mexican gourmet vanilla beans make them suitable for rich, full-bodied sweet dishes where the baker strives to harness the potent, robust taste of vanilla. This includes creamy cheesecakes, custards and crème Brulee as well as rich, vanilla-infused ice-cream and chocolate biscuits and milkshakes.

Indonesia gourmet vanilla beans

Flavour profile: Mild and well-balanced with sweet earthy, woody undertones.

Indonesia gourmet vanilla beans come from the flowering orchid of the genus Planifolia. The climate and fertile soils of Indonesia produce a heavier and plumper bean with an abundance of tiny seeds. Its flavour profile is more robust and complex than the popular Madagascar variety and is the perfect substitute for a bolder, more potent vanilla flavour.

Indonesia vanilla releases a slightly fruity aroma and taste with undertones of fig, raisins and prunes. It adds sophistication to fine-dining desserts and savoury dishes and stands up well to strong chocolate and caramel flavours. Indonesia vanilla paste and extract is perfect for sweet pies, jams and compotes because of its bold aromatics.

Indian gourmet vanilla beans

Flavour profile: Rich, full-bodied chocolate with hints of wood and spice.

Indian gourmet vanilla beans are similar to the better-known Madagascar Bourbon variety. Many bakers and chefs use the two interchangeably, depending on what's available.

Indian vanilla beans produce vanilla that is creamy, sweet and extremely aromatic. It easily imparts a woody, spicy flavour that makes it ideal for deeply aromatic sweet and savoury dishes as well as vanilla-infused milkshakes and iced coffee and tea.

Tonga gourmet vanilla beans

Flavour profile: Bold, fruity fig and raisin with undertones of earthy red wine.

Tonga gourmet vanilla beans come from the flowering orchid of the genus Planifolia that grows on the world's friendliest

islands of the Kingdom of Tonga. The orchid thrives in a hot, humid tropical climate and rich, fertile soil.

The unique flavour and aroma profile of the Tonga vanilla bean is bold and pronounced. It easily releases a rich, fruity flavour with woody undertones. It compares well with the noble, distinct characteristics of Sauvignon Cabernet. The esteemed Tonga vanilla bean is revered by gourmet chocolate makers and bakers and is one of the most sought-after vanilla beans in the world.

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