

Coffee: From the Field to Your Cup

The coffee plant is a small green tree that is grown in moist, cool and frost-free countries in the subtropical regions of the world. It has small oval shaped leaves and a white clusters of flowers that matures and grows into the coffee fruit. The fruit, known as the cherries are covered by a soft edible thin skin that children in the subtropical countries can munch on and spit out the coffee bean. Usually, the cherries are processed either by the natural method (sun drying) or the washed method (fermenting), which reveals two seeds called the coffee bean.

Originally, the coffee plant was thought to have originated in Ethiopia. Its first use was for food, which the nomads at the time would cover the coffee bean with fat and carry them around as food. Coffee beans reached the Arabian Peninsula as a result of trading popular during those times. Initially, the trade in coffee beans was banned in the Muslim states, but the trading continued and after initial opposition, it became a common drink among the Arabs. From there it spread to Turkey and Egypt and its trading extended all over the world.

When the coffee beans reached Europe, the Catholic hierarchy labeled the drinking of coffee as heathenish and for a time also banned it from consumption. Like anything that is good, the trade of coffee beans once again persevered. In the middle of the 17th century, Pope Clement VIII revoked its ban and the coffee beans spread over all of Europe. In 1668, coffee beans spread to the Americas and have since become a favorite drink of the Americans. The biggest shift in its consumption and hence its rise to popularity among Americans was after the Boston tea party where tea was made scarce and became unfashionable.

Big complicated problems were derived from such a small and simple bean. In modern society, it is always good to drink coffee at any time of the day without the worries that it initially posed.

The coffee that's served on your table comes from the two major species of the coffee plant, the Arabica and the Robusta.

Arabica coffee beans

Arabicas were the older of the two primary varieties. It is of higher quality and is therefore more expensive. Arabicas are also more difficult to farm. The beans prefer elevations that are about 3,500 to 7,000 feet with a temperature about 75 degrees Fahrenheit and an annual rainfall of 50 inches. The Arabica bean is considered to have a superior taste and has a lower caffeine content than its counterpart, the Robusta.

Robusta coffee beans

The Robusta beans, on the other hand, thrive where the Arabica could not. The beans are planted on lower elevations and provide better yields. Compared to Arabica coffee beans, the Robusta beans have a more bitter taste to them that is sometimes compared to burnt rubber. Robustas can also yield a foamy head that makes it the preferred coffee beans for espressos. The Robustas are also more caffeine rich than the Arabica coffee bean variety.

Coffee beans today are grown in many countries around the world and graded according to their characteristics. Distinction often is dependent on size, flavor, caffeine content, acidity and texture.

Some coffee drinkers however do not worry about the distinctions. For many, a cup of coffee is just a cup of coffee. If it is blended well, roasted well and prepared well, the proof of its character is for most, in the drinking.