

food

SOS: Save Our Supply of Pure Vanilla

The Panelists

John Alexopoulos, director of wine, the Equinox Resort & Spa, Manchester, VT

Sondra Bernstein, proprietor, the girl and the fig, Sonoma, CA

Jennifer Crawford-Beal, chef and co-owner, Izabella's Eatery, Bennington, VT

Scott Mayger, restaurant wine consultant and proprietor, MVB Consulting, New York City

Wyman Philbrook, general manager, Guckenheimer Dining & Catering at the John Hancock Tower Complex, Boston

John Phillips, owner, Friends Lake Inn, Chestertown, NY

Dominick Purnomo, maître d'hôtel/sommelier, Yono's Restaurant, Albany, NY

Ari Sadri, restaurant manager/sommelier, the Pitcher Inn, Warren, VT

Greg Taylor, innkeeper, the Fern Lodge, Chestertown, NY

Maarten Vandersman, CWE, sommelier, Beppe, New York City

Martha Vicas, restaurant consultant and wine educator, Mt. Kisco, NY

Beth von Benz, restaurant wine consultant and proprietor, MVB Consulting, New York City

Michael Weiss, professor of wine, Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, NY

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Vanilla is a rain forest orchid whose fruit, the vanilla pod (bean), is the source of one of the world's most popular fragrances and flavorings. Yet according to Patricia Rain, a US importer of vanilla extracts and beans, less than 1 percent of all vanilla-flavored and vanilla-scented products actually contain pure vanilla. Most companies use a "flavor identical alternative," a euphemism for synthetic vanilla, which is a less expensive substitute. Many commercial users switched to these artificial flavorings in recent years when the price of pure vanilla escalated due to a shortage of supply fueled by weather-related disasters and political unrest.

Though supplies of natural vanilla have since rebounded, industrial users have not switched back to the pure product, causing the opposite crisis: a generous supply, but no demand for real vanilla. According to Rain, "Tons of vanilla, worldwide, is going unsold at this time because there isn't a market for the beans. Ice cream and dessert manufacturers, who use the most vanilla, continue to use cheaper substitutes—even though they still charge the same price for their products as when they contained real vanilla." If this trend continues, Rains adds, "the price of vanilla will fall so far below the cost of production that farmers will have no incentive to grow it . . . and vanilla could go the way of so many other rain forest products."

To find out more about sourcing real vanilla, visit vanilla.com.

VANILLA EXTRACT/ BEANS

Reviewed by Jennifer Crawford-Beal.

vanilla extract

Arizona Vanilla Company *Tahitian*

Mellow aromas with a syrupy texture and amber coloring. *Arizona Vanilla Company*, 480-254-5369, \$69.95/128 oz

Boyajian
Madagascar Bourbon
Smooth, subtle flavors without overpowering alcohol. *Boyajian, Inc.*, 800-965-0665, \$23/25.4 oz

Frontier Natural Flavors
Organic; United States
Aromas of maple and brown sugar with nicely balanced vanilla. *Frontier Natural Products Co-Op*, 800-669-3275, \$5.05/2 oz

Golden Gate Brand
Tahitian
Sweet, fruity aromas with hints of black cherry and raspberry, reminiscent of Twizzlers. *Vanilla, Saffron Imports*, 415-648-8990, \$75/128 oz

Hawaiian Vanilla Company
Hawaiian
Deep, rich aromas with lovely coloring. Very balanced with smooth, buttery vanilla flavors. The best choice for vanilla extract or caramel coloring when used in baking. ★ *Hawaiian Vanilla Company*, 808-776-1771, \$200/gallon



Lorann Oils, Inc.
Madagascar Bourbon
A well-balanced extract with a dark caramel color.
Lorann Oils, Inc.,
800-862-8620, \$14.95/16 oz

Nielsen-Massey Vanillas, Inc.
Madagascar Bourbon
Dark color with sweet and creamy vanilla aromas.
Nielsen-Massey Vanillas, Inc.,
800-525-7873, \$17.25/qt

Rain's Choice
Madagascar Bourbon
Very fine aromas with low alcohol on the nose. Beautiful caramel color with the perfect balance of vanilla. ★
The Vanilla Company,
831-476-9111, \$65/gallon

Rain's Choice
Mexican
Bright, sharp vanilla aromas with strong alcohol.
The Vanilla Company,
831-476-9111, \$86/gallon



Sonoma Syrup Co.
Madagascar Bourbon and Tahitian Blend
Favorite! Dark, rich coloring with caramel aromas and a soft finish. ★
Sonoma Syrup Co.,
707-996-4070, \$20/8 oz

Sonoma Syrup Co.
Special Blend 'Crush'
Madagascar bourbon vanilla and Tahitian vanilla with vanilla bean seed; strong alcohol flavors with subtle vanilla.
Sonoma Syrup Co.,
707-996-4070, \$23/8 oz

vanilla beans

Arizona Vanilla Company Mexican
Heady vanilla aromas with long, glossy pods and rich chocolate tones; lovely colors. ★
Arizona Vanilla Company,
480-254-5369, \$135/kg (based on quantity purchased)

Aust & Hachmann Papua New Guinea
Tahitensis vanilla beans; thin pods with glossy, oily, and rich aromas.
Aust & Hachmann Canada Ltd., 514-482-4615,
price based on individual requirements

Frontier Culinary Spices
Organic; United States
Thin, round pods with true vanilla aromas.
Frontier Natural Products
Co-Op, 800-669-3275,
\$10.05/2 beans

Golden Gate Brand Papua New Guinea
Blanched-almond aromas with firm pods and dark brown to black coloring; some pods are glossy while others are matte.
Vanilla, Saffron Imports,
415-648-8990, \$48/lb

Golden Gate Brand Vanilla Planifolia
Long with a slight shimmer to the pod; dry raisin aromas with hints of leather and wood.
Vanilla, Saffron Imports,
415-648-8990, \$48/lb

Nielsen-Massey Vanillas, Inc.
Madagascar Bourbon
Drier pods with easily released seeds; coppery tones and medicinal aromas.
Nielsen-Massey Vanillas, Inc.,
800-525-7873, \$66.50/lb

Rain's Choice Tahitian
Very pliable, juicy, plump, and fat pod with light brown coloring; the king of vanilla beans with rich aromas and hints of nutty chocolate. My favorite. ★
The Vanilla Company,
831-476-9111, \$230/lb

Rain's Choice Uganda Bourbon
Evenly sized pods with slightly glossy coloring and creamy aromas.
The Vanilla Company,
831-476-9111, wholesale pricing by request

ARTISANAL FLATBREADS AND CRACKERS

Reviewed by the *Santé* tasting panel.

Domaine de Provence / United States
Everything Crisp Lavash Bread
5½-inch long, thin, rectangular flatbread with a traditional dry crackerlike texture and random air bubbles. Dominant flavors of caraway and sesame with a hint of salt; pleasing sodalike finish.
Sid Wainer & Son,
800-423-8333, \$3.99/5 oz

Domaine de Provence / United States
Fresh Garlic Home Baked Crackers
Rectangular cracker, about 2

inches long and more than 1 inch wide with dense texture and wheat taste; garlic adds subtle grace notes.
Sid Wainer & Son,
800-423-8333, \$2.99/2 oz

Falcone's Flatbreads / New York
Fat Free Cinnamon Flatbread
Long, rectangular, dark-toasted cracker with cinnamon-sugar topping. Lightly sweet and gently spiced with somewhat dense texture.
Falcone's Cookieland Ltd.,
718-236-4200, \$11.20/case

Falcone's Flatbreads / New York
Garlic Flatbread
Sometimes overtoasted in spots, but the hearty baked-garlic flavor blends nicely with the sesame seed topping.
Falcone's Cookieland Ltd.,
718-236-4200, \$9.50/case

Falcone's Flatbreads / New York
Sesame Flatbread
Well-baked rectangular cracker with generous sesame flavor and mildly sweet finish.
Falcone's Cookieland Ltd.,
718-236-4200, \$9.50/case

Falwasser Australia / Queensland, Australia
Natural Crispbread
Ultrathin 2½-inch rounds, faintly embossed with brand name and palm fronds. Irregular edges give handmade look. Slightly tangy flavor and very crisp with a unique rye finish.
34° Foods with Latitude,
303-861-4818, \$5.99/5.3 oz

