

About Queen Vanilla

Queen Vanilla Essence is the culmination of a century old recipe and the distinctly rich flavour of the Madagascar Bourbon Vanilla Bean.

Its versatility and convenience have seen the 'big taste in the little bottle' embraced by generations of creative kitchens and have lead Queen Fine Foods into its diverse new age.

Vanilla is the only fruit of an orchid. There are over 100 varieties of vanilla orchids, but only two species are used for culinary flavouring - *Vanilla planifolia* and *Vanilla tahitensis*. Bourbon beans, known as *V. planifolia*, are those grown in Madagascar, Comoros Islands and Reunion on the African east coast.

At harvest the vanilla pods do not have any aroma. The exotic flavour characteristics of vanilla beans develop as a result of an extensive curing process.

Premium beans, regardless of where they come from, should have a rich, full aroma, be oily to touch, and sleek in appearance. Beans to avoid are those with very little scent, that are smokey, brittle or dry, or are mildewed.

Queen blends vanilla beans from all over the world, however the largest portion of our beans come from Madagascar (Bourbon vanilla beans).

Queen's management and staff have wide experience in the selection and extraction of beans, and choose only the choicest quality beans. All

Queen Vanilla is extracted at our factory in Brisbane according to the highest food standards. The recipe used in extraction is almost identical to that used when the first "Queen" brand Vanilla Essence appeared more than 100 years ago. The only other additives are sugar, water and alcohol.

Queen produces a number of types of Natural Vanilla Bean Extracts, catering for home use, chefs and the industrial market.

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Queen Vanilla Bean Paste

Queen Vanilla Bean Paste is the vanilla for future home cooking. It contains Pure Vanilla Beans (incl. seeds) and the finest Vanilla Extract to create an authentic vanilla appearance in dessert sauces, cream & ice cream. The product is vanilla beans in a jar, 1 teaspoon = 1 whole cured vanilla bean. It is shelf stable, contains 100% natural ingredients and used by some of Australia's best chefs. It is convenient and a much more cost effective way to deliver real vanilla into pannacotta's, brulee's, ice cream, cream & custards. Can also be used as a delicious vanilla swirl on desserts. Queen Vanilla Bean Paste is for consumers who appreciate the art of fine home baking and cooking.

Queen Vanilla Essence

Traditional vanilla essence for all baking needs!

Vanilla essence 'sweetens' the baking ingredients and is an essential ingredient in most desserts. Queen Vanilla Essence had been made from the original recipe for 100 years, using 100% pure vanilla beans! There are no substitute ingredients like some brands.

Queen Vanilla Extract

Black Label – chef's strength! It's a concentrate from real vanilla beans. When the recipe requires a more intense vanilla flavour and aroma, Queen's 'Black Label' Extract produces the most delicious results!

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Curing Vanilla Beans

The vanilla fruit on picking is like a very slim green banana. It is only after the bean has been cured and matured that it will gain the distinctive vanilla aroma that we all know so well.

Top quality beans tend to be long, fleshy, supple, very dark brown/black in colour, strongly aromatic, somewhat oily, and free from scars and blemishes. Lower quality beans are shorter and thinner, tend to be hard and dry, and are mid-brown to reddish-brown in colour. Most of the vanilla beans traded worldwide are for the manufacture of Natural Vanilla Essence and Extract, so the beans' appearance is not of prime importance.



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History of Vanilla

The history of vanilla is filled with adventure and romance. Used by the Aztec people of Central America before time can remember, Bernal Diaz, an officer under intrepid pioneer Hernando Cortes is thought to be the first European to be introduced to vanilla. It is said that Diaz observed Montezuma (Aztec Emperor) drink “chocolatl”, a beverage made of crushed seeds of the cacao tree and ground vanilla beans (called tlilxochitl). This all occurred in approximately 1520, and legend has it that the drink was served in goblets made of pure gold.

The Spaniards imported the beans to Spain and Europe in the late 16th Century, where factories were set up making the same chocolate and vanilla drink as they had tasted in Central America. The vanilla flavour quickly became extremely popular all over Europe. It is rumoured that Queen Elizabeth I would not eat anything unless it was flavoured with vanilla.

The plant was introduced to tropical areas of the new and old worlds, where it grew prolifically, but bore no fruit. It was only realised in 1836 that without the natural pollinators which only existed in Central America, the flowers could never be pollinated. In 1841, a former slave in Reunion developed the simple method of hand-pollinating flowers which is used to this day.

Mexican Vanilla is regarded as having the purest aromatics and most traditional vanilla flavour, however the western palette usually prefers Bourbon (Madagascan) Vanilla. The deeper ‘body’ flavour of this species has resulted in it becoming the largest traded Vanilla type.



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The Vanilla Plant

Vanilla is the fruit of a tropical orchid. It is the only orchid that bears fruit. The predominant varieties of vanilla are *Vanilla planifolia* or *Vanilla fragrans*. There are 107 different varieties of vanilla plant known, however most are of no commercial value.

The beans mature in about 2 years, and have a typical life span of about 12 years. The plant blossoms one day each spring, and for half that day, is able to be pollinated. The time between pollination and harvesting the fruit is between 6 and 9 months. The fruits are harvested as they begin to ripen (the tips become yellow). It is essential to pick the pods at the correct stage, as too early gives an inferior product, and too late results in the bean splitting during curing.

The vanilla plant can grow up to 60 feet in height, but in commercial plantations, is usually trained to a more workable height (5-6 feet). The vines grow on some kind of support, usually a tree which provides the correct amount of shade and also can be used for commercial purposes. In Madagascar the vines usually grow from Physic Nut trees.

The support trees are normally planted in rows, with the resulting plantation looking like a typical grape vineyard.

Yields vary greatly all over the world, however a typical good vanillery is said to yield 500-800 kilograms of cured beans per hectare.



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Processing and Manufacturing

Beans are sorted according to quality and degree of maturity, then plunged into hot water over a wood fire. They are held there for 1-3 minutes, then drained and wrapped in a dark cotton cloth and placed in a sweating box. They are left for 24 hours, and then inspected to separate those which have not been 'killed'.

The beans are then sun-dried on dark cloth stands for two hours each day for 6-8 days until they are quite supple.

The beans are then dried in the shade for 2-3 months. The beans are inspected daily, those that have dried to a sufficient level are removed immediately. In countries where the weather is inclement in summer, ovens operating at 45-50 degrees are used.

The finished beans are then given an airing, restraightened and sorted before being bundled for shipment.



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