

Aromatic journeys with the new range of flavoured coffees: Nespresso Variations

New this season, Nespresso has combined natural flavours from spices and fruits with the Livanto Grand Cru to create three enticing and distinct flavours for discerning tastes: the refreshing contrast of anise, the smooth and sweet note of vanilla and the sugar-and-spice scent of apple and cinnamon.

Vanilla

The creamy smoothness of vanilla combines with the mellowness of the Livanto Grand Cru to unfold flowery and voluptuous onto the palette. Made of a blend of natural flavours, the Vanilla Variation transports you to a tropical paradise on the Island of Réunion.

Apple and Cinnamon

Sweet and and comfortably spicy to heat even the coldest heart... The Apple and Cinnamon Variation entices with the flavours of natural cinnamon bark while apple voluptuously unravels its sweetened notes. A warm harmony evoking the intimate interior of an Alpine chalet.

Anise

Spread out over the velvety aromas of the Livanto Grand Cru, the Anise Variation reveals an unexpected finesse. An elegance that recalls the refreshing shade of a Rajasthan palace, made with natural aniseed flavour.



NEW FLAVOURED NESPRESSO

Experiences of the Senses

What goes into a flavour? World spice expert and connoisseur Ian Hemphill shares fascinating and delectable details about this season's three featured spices. Experience a sensory adventure with the new Nespresso Variations.

PHOTOGRAPHER: ULRIKE HOLSTEN





Origin and History

Anise is native to the Middle East and is widely cultivated in temperate climates, notably North Africa, Greece, southern Russia, Malta, Spain, Italy, Mexico and Central America. It is claimed that anise was found in Egypt as early as 1500 BC. Anise was highly regarded in the first century in Rome for its digestive properties, attributed to the volatile oil compound anethole, a substance also found in fennel seeds and star anise. At the conclusion of indulgent feasts and banquets, the Romans, lacking modern antacid and digestive preparations, would consume cakes made with aniseeds and other aromatic spices to aid digestion and freshen the breath. During the Middle Ages the cultivation of anise spread to Europe. However, it only flowers and produces seeds in warmer climatic conditions. Aniseed was often utilised to flavour horse and cattle feed. Dogs also like it, and it is included in pet food. It is said that a little aniseed will attract mice to mousetraps!

Anise is now widely used in the manufacture of confectionery (anise oil often provides the licorice flavouring in sweets), cough drops, a French cordial called anisette and a number of anise-flavoured alcoholic drinks such as ouzo, pernod, pastis and aguardiente, a Latin-American favourite. Aniseed should not be confused with star anise, the predominantly Chinese spice, although the essential oil of star anise is often used as a substitute for aniseed.

Processing

Anise will only flower and fruit after a long hot summer, climatic conditions that are also excellent for drying the seeds. The seed heads are harvested, hung or laid out to dry in a warm, well-ventilated area with some direct sunlight. When dry and crisp, the flower heads are rubbed to separate the seeds from the flowers and pieces of stem, then sieved ready for storage. Aniseed is best purchased in its whole form and can retain its flavour for up to three years. Store in an airtight pack and keep away from extremes of heat, light and humidity as this will accelerate the deterioration and loss of fresh anise notes.

Use

The fresh, distinctly licorice and fennel flavour notes in aniseed makes it an ideal spice for Indian vegetable and seafood dishes. However, the Indians will more often use its close cousin, fennel. Its mild licorice flavour complements biscuits and cakes; aniseed features in traditional baking in both Germany and Italy. Scandinavian rye bread contains aniseed as do a wide range of smallgoods. A small amount of whole or ground aniseed can be added to vegetable soups, white sauces and chicken and shellfish pies. The fresh flavour of aniseed has a balancing effect on rich cheese dishes and is employed to cut the greasy effect of some ingredients in Moroccan cuisine.

Anise

One of the most delicate of herb plants, anise grows to a spindly 50 cm tall, has feathery, flat, serrated leaves reminiscent of Italian parsley and bears creamy white flowers on wispy, fine stems in late summer. The aniseed spice (gathered after flowering) consists of two tiny seeds, oval and crescent-shaped, about 3 mm long, many of which when split retain the fine stalk that passes through the centre of the fruit, giving it the appearance upon close inspection of a tiny mouse. The pale brown seeds with their fine, lighter coloured ribs have a distinct licorice flavour that is not too pungent or lingering.

Vanilla

One can only imagine how the Spaniard, Cortés must have felt as his senses experienced their first taste of vanilla and chocolate when, in 1520, the Aztec emperor Montezuma treated him to an exotic chocolate and vanilla drink sweetened with honey. So impressed were the Spanish with this discovery that production was established in Spain for the manufacture of chocolate, flavoured with vanilla imported from Mexico. Vanilla has continued to capture the imagination of cooks, chefs and food manufacturers ever since, and today vanilla remains one of the world's most popular flavours.

Most consumers of vanilla would be surprised to discover that it is actually a tropical climbing orchid (*Vanilla Planifolia*). Vanilla beans (or pods) hang from the vine in clusters. When fresh and green they have no aroma or vanilla taste at all; it is only when cured that vanilla beans reveal their true vanilla flavour. A cured vanilla bean is dark brown to black in colour, and when split lengthwise, a dark sticky mass of millions of minute seeds is revealed. The aroma of a vanilla bean is fragrant, floral, sweet and highly agreeable, which may be the basis for the myth that vanilla is a powerful aphrodisiac.

Origin and History

Vanilla is indigenous to Mexico and Central America. Although plants were taken to England as early as 1733 and were re-introduced at the beginning of the 19th century, all serious attempts to have them produce pods outside their natural habitat failed. In the middle of the 19th century the reason for this barrenness was found to be the absence of natural pollinators, and thus a satisfactory method of hand-pollination was devised. By the early 20th century, vanilla was cultivated in Réunion, Tahiti and parts of Africa and Madagascar. Now vanilla is grown in many tropical areas of the world.

Processing

For such a widely used and popular flavouring, the production of vanilla remains an extraordinarily labour-intensive process. It begins with hand-fertilising the flowers, and culminates in a traditional curing process that has remained unchanged for centuries. Green, just harvested and tasteless beans are heated to start the drying and curing process in which naturally occurring enzymes create the flavour component vanillin. Then the vanilla beans are spread out on woollen blankets in the sun. At day's end the pods are gathered up and wrapped in blankets and laid out to sweat on racks at night. The vanilla beans go through this process for up to 28 days and are then stored for three months until they have turned almost black and the curing process is complete. Vanilla extract is made by soaking cut beans in alcohol, resulting in a solution with vanilla extractives in suspension in the liquid.

Use

Vanilla beans will flavour custards and fruit compotes, cakes and biscuits and crème fraîche. Only use beans that are dark, soft, pliant and fragrant. If you wish to infuse the flavour of vanilla into food without discolouring it, use a whole bean. To add a natural, concentrated flavour of vanilla to recipes, slit a bean in half and scrape out the sticky, sweet seeds. Don't throw the skin away though, as left-over skins may be kept in a jar of castor sugar to make your own vanilla sugar for baking. And besides cooking with vanilla, wiping a refrigerator with vanilla extract will remove unpleasant odours!



Cinnamon

Think of apple pie and the first aroma that wafts into the brain is that of cinnamon. Many cooks, though, are not aware that there are two types of cinnamon. One is from Sri Lanka (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*) and the other, cassia, is from southern China and South-East Asia (*Cinnamomum cassia*).

Cinnamon sticks are most often seen in 8 cm lengths of many concentric layers of paper-thin bark, rolled into cylinders about 1 cm in diameter. The colour of cinnamon is a uniform light brown to pale tan. The fragrance is sweet, perfumed, warm and pleasantly woody with no trace of bitterness or dominating pungency.

Cassia, by contrast, is generally found in two whole forms. One is flat pieces of dark-brown slivers, smooth on one surface and rough and corky on the other. The other form is as sticks. Cassia sticks are smooth and similar in appearance to cinnamon, except for the thickness of the curl of bark (about 2 mm as opposed to paper thin) and the reddish-brown colour. The aroma of ground cassia (grinding releases the volatile oils and makes the smell more obvious) is highly perfumed, penetrating, sweet and lingering. The flavour has an agreeable heat and pungency.



Origin and History

Cinnamon is said to be among the oldest of spices. References to it date back 2500 years to the land of the Pharaohs, where cinnamon was used in the embalming process. In 1500 BC the Egyptians voyaged to “the Land of Punt” (present-day Somalia) to find precious metals, ivory, exotic animals, spices and cinnamon, which no doubt had reached there because Arab traders passed nearby. The ancient Greeks and Romans probably had both cinnamon and cassia available to them. Records of

cassia in China go back to 4000 BC. Batavia (or Java) cassia grew wild on the islands of Sumatra, Java and Borneo. Any search for the true origins of cinnamon and cassia traded in antiquity is shrouded in mystery as the traders circulated improbable stories to keep their sources of supply a secret. Today the world’s best cinnamon still comes from Sri Lanka, and various grades of cassia come predominantly from China, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Processing

The processing of cinnamon in Sri Lanka is possibly one of the most dexterous skills still demonstrated by traditional workers in the spice trade today, and it is fascinating to watch. Using a basic metal instrument, a peeler scrapes off the outer layer of corky-looking bark and discards it. Next he rubs the stem with a brass rod, bruising and loosening the remaining paper-thin layer of cinnamon, preparing it for peeling. Then he deftly removes gutters of fine, underneath bark which are put out in the sun for no more than an hour to firm up and partially dry. The peelers then begin telescoping one paper-thin 30 cm length of bark into the other until a metre-long quill is formed before being dried.

Cassia is harvested in a different manner from cinnamon as trees are stripped of bark at the beginning of the rainy season, when it is easiest to remove. The bark is cut off in sections, the tree felled and the remaining bark removed in the same way.

Cinnamon and cassia are not easy to grind yourself, so if a recipe calls for ground cinnamon or cassia, buying a good-quality powder is recommended.

Use

Whole cinnamon sticks are used in dishes when the flavour is intended to infuse into the liquid medium. When stewing a compote of fruit or pie apples, preparing a curry, spiced rice dish such as biriyani or even making “glühwein,” use whole cinnamon or cassia sticks. Powder is most popular in Western countries when cinnamon is mixed with other ingredients to flavour cakes, pastries, fruit pies, milk puddings, curry powders, garam masala, mixed spice and other spice blends. The greater pungency of cassia (often called “baker’s cinnamon” or “Dutch cinnamon”) has become popular in commercial baked goods such as cinnamon doughnuts, apple strudel, fruit muffins and sweet, spiced biscuits.

Which one you use should simply be a matter of personal preference; just keep in mind that cassia is more strongly perfumed and pungent than cinnamon, so it is best used with other distinctly flavoured ingredients such as dried fruits. Cinnamon, on the other hand, complements fresh ingredients well, such as apples, pears and bananas.

Flavoured Talk with a Coffee Expert

Nespresso coffee expert Sylvia Ohresser is Project Manager at the Product Technology Centre in Orbe, Switzerland. The N Magazine spoke with her for a taste of what has gone into the new Nespresso Variations, after more than 50 test recipes and two years of research and development.

N Magazine: What led you to opt for these three flavours in particular?

Sylvia Ohresser: We actually tried lots of flavours, in various concentrations. Some did not fit well with the coffee. For some of the other first ideas, like Tiramisu, it was hard to find natural flavours. Finally we arrived at a pre-selection of flavours, and then decided to launch three flavours at the same time. Also, we wanted to cover several categories: to have a spicy flavour, a flavour that is more common like vanilla, and then anise, because we also wanted to offer a more unusual flavour variety.

N: Are the flavours chosen – vanilla, anise, apple and cinnamon – natural flavours?

O: The flavours we use are all natural, which means that they are natural plant extracts. The natural aniseed flavour, for example, is derived from aniseed.

N: Livanto was chosen as the base for these flavoured coffees. Why was it chosen rather than the other eleven varieties?

O: First, we had to look for the right coffee base with the ideal balance which would best combine with the flavours... We tested several blends with flavours, and we found that a coffee that has a more roasty and less acid taste fits better with the flavours. We had the impression that the flavours enhanced the acidity of the coffee, so it’s better not to start with a blend that is already quite acidic. And this allows us to keep more coffee flavour in the final product – the coffee is not covered by the flavour.

N: One last thing: A lot of people add cream or milk to their coffee. Does this dilute the flavours, do they come through?

O: That’s a very good question. With sugar, the flavour is enhanced and milk tends to cover the taste a little bit. To accommodate customer preferences, we optimized the flavour concentration so that the flavour still comes through with a Lungo cup size. This means that the recipes have been developed for espresso (40 ml), but can also be prepared as a Lungo (110 ml).