



Cocoa Bean Varieties

There are three main types of cocoa bean which are used in chocolate. They are the Criollo, Forastero and a hybrid between the two, called Trinitario. Criollo and Trinitario are referred to as 'Fine Flavour' or 'Fino De Aroma' cocoa beans, while Forastero is considered more ordinary and used for the bulk of chocolate production today (with some exceptions). Over 90% percent of the world's cocoa is Forastero and is mostly grown in West Africa. The remainder is fine flavour cocoa mostly from Trinitario and Criollo varieties of beans.

Criollo:

Criollo cocoa beans have a very distinct reddish colour, and an equally distinctive complex taste which can include flavours of toffee, nuts, citrus and red fruits. Criollo beans are very rare and are generally regarded as providing the best flavour profile of all the bean types. However, the flavour profile is very different to the bulk of dark chocolate today that is made with Forastero beans that we are all more familiar with. Two hundred years ago Criollo was the predominant cocoa bean but unfortunately, due to its susceptibility to disease, has now become quite rare and hard to get. The Forastero is much more resistant to disease and now dominates the world-wide market for chocolate. Today most Criollo beans are closer to Trinitario than their pure ancestors. The most important Criollos today are found in Venezuela. The best known of these is Porcelana (also from Venezuela) which is even rarer.

Trinitario:

Trinitario cocoa beans are a hybrid between Criollo and Forastero and originated in Trinidad. Trinitario beans have a spicy, earthy and fruity flavour profile. In 1727 disaster struck and the crop in Trinidad failed. The exact reasons are still unknown but theories include problems with fungi and disease. It was a huge blow to Trinidad's cocoa economy, which did not recover until 1756 with the introduction of the more robust Forastero from the Amazon region. The new variety was combined with the remaining Criollo trees thus creating the new Trinitario variety. Today Trinitario beans can be found across in Venezuela, Ecuador, Cameroon, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Java and Papua New Guinea. Trinitario is the predominant fine flavour cocoa and is the most likely bean to be found in high-quality dark chocolate. Today the Venezuelan Carenero and Rio Caribe varieties are very highly regarded.

Forestero:

Forastero is the most widespread variety which has been cultivated for mass production. Originally from the Amazon region, there are many types of Forastero trees all over the world, the most common variety being the Amenolado found in Brazil and West Africa. Forastero beans have a typically strong, bitter, acidic flavour profile. While most Forastero beans are used in bulk chocolate, there are exceptions, such as the Ecuadorian Cacao Nacional and Arriba which are defined as fine flavour cocoa. In 2011 a rare Peruvian Nacional Forastero was discovered by chance. Forastero means "foreigner" in Spanish, in contrast to Criollo which is the word for "native". This distinction was made by the Spanish who at first imported Criollo cocoa exclusively from Venezuela and thus regarded Criollo as the original variety of cocoa, as opposed to the "foreign" Forastero from the Amazon region.