

Ss

Set Set Set Se,

a ee

Se in nin

—x |

becrets to al Perieen Gtipiom @emec

You can spend \$20 a pound for premium coffee, but

unless Its fresh and you're using proper brewing tech- niques, its a waste of money. Here's what you need to know to make the perfect cup. sy KEITH DRESSER

BUYING AND STORING TIPS

. ~ DO buy loose beans in small quantities no

more than a few days from the roasting date (ask before you buy); our testing has shown that roast- ed beans are ready for the compost pile after just

{0 to 12 days (see “Flavor Countdown” at right).

Buy from a local roaster or a store that sells a high volume, upping your chances of buying beans from a recently roasted batch.

DO buy prebagged coffee | inaheat-sealed, alu- minized Mylar bag with a one-way | degassing valve. This valve (sometimes no more than a bump) releases carbon | dioxide to stop the bag from | inflating while keeping out oxygen, which turns coffee stale. Unopened, these bags keep beans as | fresh as the day they were roasted for up to 90 days (the outer limit for beans in such packaging cited by roasters including George Howell Terroir Coffee Company, in Acton, Mass., and national retailer Peet's Coffee & Tea). Of course, as soon as you open the bag, the clock starts ticking on freshness.

|. yDON'T rely on expiration dates. We've found some supermarket brands of coffee with expiration dates as far as two years out from the roasting date.

3 DON'T buy preground coffee. Grinding speeds oxidation and the deterioration of flavor. When we compared coffee brewed from just-ground beans with coffee brewed from beans ground 24 hours earlier, tasters overwhelmingly preferred the coffee brewed from freshly ground beans. Grinding the

night before is also not optimal: Studies show the exposed coffee cells begin to break down within the hour.

Freshness Test To check if your beans are fresh, scoop bag and leave it overnight. If the beans are w from the carbon dioxide that they release. If they've passed the point of peak freshness.

Y2 cup Into a zipper- thin seven to 10 days of roasting, the bag remains flat, then the beans are not producing gas—a sign

Flavor Countdown To determine how long coffee maintains ideal flavor after roasting. we bought 30 bags of beans (all from the same batch, packaged within hours of roasting in one-way valve bags). Over two weeks, we used our haul to prepare two pots of coffee daily: one made with beans from a just-opened bag, the other using beans stored on the counter in a sealed zipper-lock bag with the air pressed out. A few very discriminating tasters noticed a change in taste after just a few days of storage; many tasters noticed a deterioration after 10 days; most tast- ers agreed the coffee tasted markedly less fresh after 12 days. Bottom line: Opened beans stored in an airtight container should be used within 10 to 12 days.

Where to Store Beans: Counter, Fridge, or Freezer? If you finish a bag of beans in less than 10 to 12. days (see “Flavor Countdown,” above), store them either in the original bag or ina zipper-lock bag away from heat and light. If you plan to keep beans longer than this time frame, store them in the freezer to limit contact with air and moisture. (Never store coffee in the fridge, where it will pick up off-flavors.) For the best results, portion beans (whether storing on the counter or in the freezer) in small zipper-lock bags In one-day allotments to keep air and moisture exposure to the barest minimum.

Jock bag and press out all the air, then seal the they will make the bag puff up

For perfect coffee, the goal is to extract 18 to 22 percent of the soluble solids—coffee brewed below this range tastes sour and weak; above this range, it tastes harsh. Here are tips to ensure ideal extraction and flavor.

|. USE FILTERED WATER A cup of coffee is about 98 percent water, so if your tap water tastes bad or has strong mineral flavors, your coffee will

too. We found that the test kitchen's tap water masked some of the coffee's complexity, compared to coffee made with filtered water. Don't bother buying bottled water—just use a filtration pitcher.

2. **HEAT WATER TO THE PROPER TEMPERATURE** The most desirable flavor compounds in coffee are released in water between 195 and 205 degrees. A panel of our tasters judged coffee brewed at 200 degrees as having

the fullest, roundest flavor. Once water has boiled (212 degrees), let it rest 10 to 15 seconds to bring it down to this temperature.

3. **USE THE RIGHT GRIND, BREW FOR THE RIGHT TIME** These two components

—go hand in hand. Brewing time will dictate how you grind the coffee. In general, the longer the brewing time, the coarser the grounds should be (see “Recommended Brewing Methods” on page 17). As a rule, brewing should take 4 to 6 minutes. Don't try to adjust strength by changing the grind; grounds that are too fine for your brewing method will result in overextraction, while grounds that are too coarse will be underextracted.

4. **ADD THE RIGHT AMOUNT** The norm is 2 tablespoons of ground beans for every 6 ounces of water. If you prefer stronger or weaker coffee, adjust the amount of grounds per cup; changing the amount of water can easily lead to over- or underextraction, because the less water you use, the shorter the brewing time and vice versa.

5. **KEEP THE POT CLEAN** Since coffee beans contain oils, every time you brew a pot, some oil is left behind. Over time, that oil will make your coffee taste rancid. Rinse your pot with hot water after each use and scrub all brewing apparatus with hot

- soapy water at least once

RECOMMENDED BREWING METHODS

For the convenience of an automatic drip coffee maker, we've learned that most models don't heat the water to the ideal temperature, and the brewing times are too long. Longing to splurge on the one coffee maker we really like

compute the

), we recommend a French press or manual drip.

French Press *How It Works:* A French

Why We Like It: Because

2. Add just-boiled water steadily, saturating all the grounds.

3. Add 2 tablespoons coffee for every 6 ounces water (preheat pot first with hot tap water).

5. With even pressure, steadily press down filter.

4. Add lid and steep coffee for about five minutes (four minutes for smaller pots).

Manual Drip

How It Works: Place ground coffee in a wedge-shaped filter holder and pour water over it into a container below.

Why We Like It: The manual drip allows the natural acidity of coffee to shine through, yielding bright, flavorful coffee. As with the French press, you control water temperature and brew time.

Because you have to add water in batches, you can't leave the kitchen during brewing.

The Right Grind; Medium (like coarse cornmeal) or fine (like fine cornmeal).

Downside: Slow

Grind: medium-fine (like fine cornmeal)

Filter: metal filters.

4. Add 2 tablespoons coffee for every 6 ounces water to filter

2. Pour 1 cup just-boiled water over grounds, saturating thoroughly; let stand 30 seconds,

3. Pour remaining hot water over grounds, in batches if necessary,

(warm thermos with hot tap water), stirring gently after each addition

SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2009

A Cup Above

The following pieces of equipment are favorites for a more enjoyable cup. **S&S**

test kitchen

FRENCH PRESS *f* BODUM CHAMBORD 8-cup French Press

Price: \$39.95

Comments: Coffee connoisseurs willing to overlook the precise calibration and multiple steps required by the French press rave about the complex flavors of its brew. And few high-quality drip coffee makers can beat its price.

COFFEE GRINDER CAPRESSO Cool Grind
Price: \$19.95

Comments: Like many blade grinders, this one struggles to grind evenly. But we like two other features: a large capacity and a deep cup that holds grounds without spilling.

THERMAL CARAFE THERMOS NISSAN Stainless Steel Carafe Brae
Price: \$50.99
Comments: Besides its excellent temperature retention, we liked this carafe's lever-action stopper, which allows

for one-handed pouring without dripping. Both the carafe and

lid are dishwasher-safe (most others aren't).

DRIP COFFEE MAKER TECHNIVORM Moccamaster Coffee Maker

Price: \$265
Comments: If you must buy an automatic drip machine, this is the one. Though pricey, it's the only drip coffee maker

that hit optimal temperatures for brewing and serving in

Our tests. It's also fast and very simple to operate, and pieces disassemble easily for cleaning.

MK COOK'S VIDEOS Original Test Kitchen Videos

www.cooksillustrated.com/oct09 VIDEO Tips

- How to buy and store coffee
- How to brew coffee