



# Vanilla: The Cultural History of the World's Favorite Flavor and Fragrance

*Patricia Rain*

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## **Vanilla: The Cultural History of the World's Favorite Flavor and Fragrance** Patricia Rain

It has seduced kings and comforted millions. Part culinary history, part cultural commentary, Vanilla tells the remarkable story of the world's most popular flavor and scent.

The Spanish considered vanilla the ultimate aphrodisiac, the Totonac Indians called it the fruit of the gods, and the Aztecs taxed the Mayans in vanilla beans, using the beans as currency. Today, vanilla is in our coffee, our perfume, tea, home products, body lotion, and just about anything imaginable.

Patricia Rain explores the incredibly diverse effect of vanilla on the worlds of food, medicine, psychology, and even politics. She intertwines the fields of cultural anthropology, botany, folklore, and economics, tracing the marvelous path of vanilla throughout world history. Vanilla shows how the impact and marketing of this ubiquitous little bean over the last eight hundred years saved the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Tahiti, put Madagascar on the map, drove the success of the great Parisian perfume houses and Europe's confection industry, and spurred trade routes across the Indian Ocean. Rain examines the rich history of vanilla with exacting detail and discusses its current role in our lives and the modern retail world, where the "vanilla boom" has caused the prices of many common consumer items to skyrocket.

Filled with fascinating insights, quirky characters, trivia, and even recipes, this beautifully written book is perfect for vanilla lovers, history buffs, and anyone interested in a real-life captivating story.

## **Vanilla: The Cultural History of the World's Favorite Flavor and Fragrance Details**

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# **From Reader Review Vanilla: The Cultural History of the World's Favorite Flavor and Fragrance for online ebook**

## **Ian says**

An excellent and extremely thorough journey through the world of vanilla. From the very birth of the bean as a food to the current agricultural practices, this book explores everything vanilla! A must read for all Gastronomes!!!

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## **Michele says**

If you want to learn about vanilla, this is the place to start. Rain provides a foundation for all things vanilla, including stories, anecdotes, cooking tips, and a scattering of recipes to get you started on a life-long love of the spice that captivated the world.

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## **LettheSea says**

Interesting!

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## **Rogue Reader says**

Love these single substance culinary research books.

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## **Sacha says**

So much interesting information! Occassionally dry writing, but worth it.

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## **Stephen says**

Who in the world would write 372 pages about vanilla? And who in their right mind would read all 372 of them? I can safely say that I now know more about vanilla than I ever knew there was to know. Patricia Rain is an anthropologist, cultural historian, cookbook author, lecturer and vanilla broker ... which is a lot to squeeze into one lifetime. She writes about vanilla: its natural history, its botany, its cultivation, its cultural significance, its spirituality, its biochemistry, its economic import, its psychobiology, and offers recipes, in the bargain. Her book -- exceptionally well researched, amply illustrated, entertainingly written -- is a sort of test for foodish geekness. If you enjoy it thoroughly, as I did, you pass the test.

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### **Miriam-Lea says**

A great history of vanilla with lots of recipes for vanilla beans and some invaluable information on the care of the vanilla orchid, one of my new houseplants.

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### **Jennifer says**

While I enjoyed learning more about vanilla, this was a somewhat frustrating read. For one thing, I think this book is in dire need of a copyeditor. I found it rather disorganized and there were several sections that did not seem to follow from anything previously discussed. There were also portions containing a great deal of extraneous information. And there were multiple sentences that simply made no sense scattered throughout, and every time I came across one it drove me to distraction. This book also lacked an index, which made it almost impossible to refer to previously provided information when necessary. I had no idea how much I appreciated indices before this.

Including the recipes was a great idea, but it would have been even better if more of them had been linked more closely to the text. For example, during a discussion of Tahitian vanilla, the text said that since fresh fish is a dietary staple in Tahiti, almost everyone had a recipe for mahi-mahi in vanilla cream sauce. But the recipe that immediately followed this section was not for mahi-mahi in vanilla cream sauce but for papaya chicken, which was not previously discussed at all. The last chapter was devoted to a variety of vanilla recipes and was interesting because it showed some of the savory applications of vanilla (an aspect I did not think much of at all before).

And if you can get past its weaknesses, you can extract (pun intended) a great deal of information from this book, which is why it's getting a higher rating than I would otherwise give.

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### **Grumpus says**

I love the biography of things. I love vanilla. I love history. When they're combined? Not so much.

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### **Valerie says**

Very interesting. I really learned a lot and it made me want to get a vanilla orchid to grow. Lots of recipes in there- I copied a few that I want to try. I did start to lose a bit of interest when it got to WWII and started talking about synthetic vanilla, and then what is happening now with that and real vanilla. The history part, though, I thought, was rather engrossing.

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### **Me2 says**

Was interesting to read some of the historical facts about vanilla. I thought the book was not well organized and the citations were poor, for all I know she might of made of half of the book.

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### **Amanda says**

A very interesting overview of vanilla. It is a little long and packed with information but is pretty easy to read. I very much enjoyed it.

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### **Sharon Miller says**

A lovely arm-chair safari about a favorite commodity. Well worth the time.

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### **Nathan says**

The history of Vanilla might be interesting. I couldn't finish this book either. Somewhere between cookbook (a few recipes) history lesson, cultural lesson and some other points of interest is where this book lies. Sadly the writing style isn't as engaging as other books I'm currently reading.

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### **Bob Newman says**

#### **Mexican Immigrant Keeps Madagascar Afloat**

There was an Australian movie back in the '70s called "Sunday Too Far Away" in which an alcoholic cook on a remote sheep station kept himself high with vanilla extract. That was the first time I knew it had such a high alcohol content. This book came out much later, otherwise I would have known that and thousands of other interesting facts about a humble (to most of us) product that originally grew in Mexico and Central America. No worries, mate, if you read this volume, you will never take vanilla for granted again. You will know that it is the only product that mankind obtains from an orchid, that it is the crop which takes longest to raise, treat, and process, that while it once reigned king in certain parts of coastal Mexico, it now is found from Madagascar to Tahiti, in India, Uganda, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and other tropical spots. The author describes life and times around Papantla, Vera Cruz, the Totonac Indians and the European immigrants that built their fortune on vanilla. While vanilla does not loom large in the legend of developed countries, for some, particularly Madagascar, vanilla is the primary export. She also covers a wealth of other things---spice and flavoring companies, those that made extract and artificial compounds---vanilla as medicine, vanilla as aphrodisiac, vanilla as an antidote to stress---organic vanilla and fair trade vanilla, problems of vanilla curing or preparing, the spread of vanilla from its original home, the fluctuating price of the product due to the vagaries of weather and economy. Yes, you will finish this book with far more knowledge than you started with. And I reckon that's a good thing. You may also get a lot of recipes which use vanilla. Some of them look quite delicious, for example candied winter squash with 2 teaspoons of pure vanilla extract.

However. The style of VANILLA reminded me of the old Ladies' Home Journal, or maybe Gourmet

magazine (now defunct). I constantly felt I was going to turn the page and find a "scratch and sniff". Not only stylistic matters troubled me. The editing is poor. The author obviously knew geography, but still a number of geographic mistakes crept in. Some statements, made because of a need to generalize when writing on such a wide topic, struck me as "weird history" or just incorrect. The author's English often runs off the rails...eg. "the most distinctly unique country in the world" (p.206) or "hospitable trade relations" (p.188) I could expand on this. Poor editing detracts from a reader's enjoyment and calls into question the accuracy of other material which one doesn't know about. It's a great subject, the recipes look great, but I think the book needed more work. Enthusiasm is commendable and I could give five stars for that, but three is plenty overall.

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