Finding Your Perfect Cup: How to Choose Speciality Coffee That Suits Your Taste

Understanding What Makes Coffee Speciality

Speciality coffee is not just a label. It refers to beans that score 80 points or above on a 100-point scale used by professional graders. These beans are grown in ideal conditions, harvested at peak ripeness, and processed with care. The result is a cup that carries distinct flavours, aromas, and a clean finish. But with so many options on the shelf, how do you pick one that truly suits your palate? The answer lies in knowing a few key aspects of the bean and the roast.

Step 1: Start with the Origin

Coffee beans are grown around the world, and each region imparts a unique character. Beans from Ethiopia often have bright, floral, and fruity notes. Those from Colombia tend to be well-balanced with hints of caramel and nut. Central American origins like Costa Rica or Guatemala can offer a clean cup with citrus acidity. Indonesian beans, such as those from Sumatra, are known for their earthy, spicy, and full-bodied profile.

Think about what you already enjoy in other foods and drinks. Do you like bright, wine-like flavours? Try an Ethiopian natural-processed bean. Prefer something smooth with chocolatey undertones? A washed Colombian or Brazilian bean might be your starting point. Many roasters include origin information on the bag, along with tasting notes. Use these as a guide, not a promise, because your own brewing method and water quality will affect the final taste.

Step 2: Consider the Roast Level

Roast level plays a huge role in how the bean tastes. Light roasts preserve the bean's original flavours, so you taste the fruit, floral, or acidic notes clearly. Medium roasts develop more sweetness and body while still allowing some origin character to come through. Dark roasts push the flavour toward chocolate, smoke, and bittersweet notes, often masking the bean's natural profile.



If you are new to speciality coffee, a medium roast is a safe place to start. It offers enough complexity to be interesting but is not as challenging as a light roast can be. For those who prefer a bold, robust cup with less acidity, a dark roast may be more satisfying. Light roasts reward those who want to explore the subtleties of a single origin. The key is to try a few roasts from the same origin to see how the flavour changes.

Step 3: Read the Flavour Notes with a Critical Eye

Flavour notes on a bag are not just marketing. They reflect what the roaster and the grader experienced when cupping the coffee. Common descriptors include blueberry, dark chocolate, honey, jasmine, and almond. These notes come from the bean's chemical compounds, not from added ingredients. However, your own tastebuds may pick up something different. That is perfectly normal.

When you read "cranberry" or "brown sugar", think about whether you enjoy those flavours in other contexts. If you dislike tart fruit, a coffee described as having high acidity and grapefruit notes may not suit you. If you love the smell of toasted nuts, look for beans with nutty or roasty descriptors. Over time, you will learn which terms match your preferences. Keep a simple note of what you liked and what you did not.

Step 4: Pay Attention to Acidity and Body

Acidity in coffee is not the same as sourness. Good acidity is a lively, crisp sensation, like the brightness of a lemon or a green apple. It adds complexity and a clean finish. Body refers to the weight and texture of the coffee on your tongue. A light body feels like tea, while a full body feels creamy or syrupy.

Some people prefer a bright, tea-like cup with high acidity and light body. Others want a heavy, chocolatey brew with low acidity and full body. There is no right or wrong. Think about what you enjoy in other beverages. If you like crisp white wine, you will probably enjoy high-acidity coffee. If you prefer stout or full cream, look for a coffee with a heavier body. Many roasters list both acidity and body on the bag or on their website.

Step 5: Check the Roast Date

Freshness is critical in speciality coffee. Beans are at their best between a few days and about three weeks after roasting. After that, the flavour fades and staleness creeps in. Always look for a roast date on the bag. If it is not there, the coffee may be old stock. Buy only what you can use within two to three weeks, and store the beans in an airtight container away from light and heat.



If you buy from a local roaster, you can often ask when the batch was roasted. Many speciality shops roast weekly or bi-weekly. This ensures the coffee you take home is still fresh. The Press Room, for example, roasts its own beans and focuses on freshness, so you can be confident the coffee has not been sitting on a shelf for months.

Step 6: Try Single Origins and Blends

Single origin coffee comes from one farm, region, or cooperative. It offers a clear taste of that place. Blends combine beans from multiple origins to create a balanced, consistent flavour. Neither is better. Single origins are great for exploration. Blends are often designed to work well with milk or to please a wider range of palates.

If you are curious, try a single origin from a region you have not tasted before. If you want a reliable everyday cup, a well-crafted blend may be your best bet. Many roasters offer both. The

Press Room, as a speciality coffee shop and roaster in south west London, provides a selection that lets you experiment without committing to a full bag of something you might not like.

Step 7: Let Your Brewing Method Guide You

Different brewing methods highlight different aspects of the bean. A pour-over or Aeropress brings out acidity and delicate flavours. A French press or espresso machine emphasises body and richness. If you brew with a filter, look for beans that the roaster recommends for filter coffee. If you use an espresso machine, choose beans labelled for espresso, as they are usually roasted a little darker to stand up to the pressure and concentration.

If you are unsure, ask the barista or roaster. They can point you to a bean that works well with your equipment. Most speciality shops are happy to help. And if you buy a bag that does not taste right, try it with a different brew method before giving up. Sometimes a coffee that seems flat as a pour-over shines as an espresso.

Step 8: Trust Your Own Palate

Finally, do not let anyone tell you that you should like a certain coffee. Taste is personal. A coffee that a professional scores 90 may not be your favourite, and that is fine. The goal is to find what you enjoy drinking. Keep trying different origins, roasts, and processing methods. Over time, you will develop a clear sense of what works for you.



Visit a local speciality coffee shop and ask to try a few options. Many shops offer tasting flights or will brew a small sample. This is a great way to explore without buying a whole bag. Pay attention to what excites you and what leaves you indifferent. Your preferences will change as your palate develops, so revisit old favourites every now and then.

Choosing speciality coffee is a journey, not a single destination. Each new bag is a chance to learn something about your own taste and about the world of coffee. Enjoy the process, and do not be afraid to ask questions. The people who work in speciality coffee are usually passionate and happy to share what they know.