

How to Purchase Vanilla

Vanilla is found in many forms. Look for it in grocery stores, specialty food stores, spice shops, or online.

Here is a guide to the most common varieties (ordered by flavor quality from best to least):

Vanilla Pods (a.k.a. Vanilla Beans): These are the actual pods from the vanilla orchid plant. They should be kept in a sealed container or bag, which will prevent them from drying out. To use them, split a pod in half with a knife, then use the knife's tip to scrape out the seeds. Add the seeds to your ingredients and proceed with the recipe. Oh, and don't discard the pods! If you put them in a sealed jar with some sugar, you can make vanilla-flavored sugar. Or, if you're making custard, you can simmer the vanilla bean pods in the milk. Just strain them out before proceeding with the recipe.



Vanilla Bean Paste: You can find vanilla bean paste in specialty shops (like our [favorite Boulder Spice store](#)). This paste contains the vanilla seeds, capturing their aromatic flavors. It is more economical than using vanilla beans, and it has a long shelf life.



Vanilla Powder: Vanilla powder usually has a malto-dextrin or starch base, which then has vanilla flavor and essence added to it. This preparation does not include any added alcohol.

Vanilla Extract: This is usually what you find in the grocery store. It will have a nice vanilla flavor that is suspended in an alcohol and water base, but it won't usually contain the vanilla bean seeds. It's great in cookies or for the budget-minded chef. [McCormick](#) makes a popular variety that is found in most grocery stores.



Vanilla Bean Sugar: This is exactly what it sounds like -- sugar flavored with vanilla beans. In high-quality mixes, you will be able to see parts of the vanilla bean pods and seeds.

Vanilla Syrup: Vanilla syrup is a flavoring agent that is packed with sugar, with a little vanilla thrown in as well. It's especially popular in coffee drinks. Be careful when ordering drinks with syrup or when adding it to drinks because 2 tablespoons can contain 70 calories.

Vanilla as a Flavor Booster:

Vanilla's delicate and spicy flavor lends itself well to a whole bunch of tasty dishes. We tend to use it in mostly sweet recipes, but, as we discovered in testing recipes for our book, [Salad Secrets](#), vanilla adds a surprisingly delicious kick to salad dressings as well. So don't be afraid to experiment. Whether you're whipping up a comforting vanilla custard or adding pep to a spinach salad, vanilla is the spice for you!

Berries with Vanilla Custard Sauce

Serves: 6 | *Serving Size:* 1 cup

Total Time: 15 min | *Prep:* 5 min | *Cook:* 10 min

Ingredients:

Sauce Ingredients:

2 cups skim milk or soy milk

1/4 cup sugar

1 tablespoon corn starch

1/4 cup nonfat egg substitute (or one egg)

1 tsp real vanilla extract or the seeds of 1/4 vanilla bean

Fruit:

Use 1/2 cup of a variety of fruits for each person. Try a mixture of strawberries, blackberries, and blueberries. Any soft fruit (such as kiwi, bananas, mangoes, and peaches) will also work.

Directions:

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Mix the milk, sugar, and corn starch together in a small mixing bowl with a whisk. Add the egg substitute and mix again.

Pour the custard into a small sauce pan. Heat over medium high, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens and comes to a simmer. Remove from heat and add the vanilla.

Chill in the refrigerator. Adjust the consistency with a little more milk or fat-free half and half. Serve over chilled berries or fruit.

Chef's Tips:

Creme anglaise is the base of classic vanilla ice cream and creme brulee. It is also delicious when served over cake, cookies, fruit, or meringues.

Serves 6. Each 1 cup serving: 87 calories, 0g fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 2mg cholesterol, 63mg sodium, 18g carbohydrate, 1g fiber, 15g sugars, 4g protein.

Allergens: Milk, Egg

