



Contact:

MASTERING THE ART OF ESPRESSO MAKING

Experts at Illycaffe Offer Tips

More and more, consumers are tossing aside traditional coffee and reaching for higher-quality specialty blends of espresso to enjoy at home. But the benefits of even the most costly espresso coffee can be lost through poor preparation. Renowned gourmet coffee roaster, Illycaffe has refined espresso making to an art and science. After sixty years and lifelong devotion from two generations of the Illy family, Illycaffe passes down espresso making secrets to culinary enthusiasts.

According to Stefano Ripamonti, Illycaffe Espresso USA president, the North American subsidiary of the renowned Italian espresso company, "We know that serving espresso and specialty coffee at home is becoming increasingly popular. We responded by making our Illycaffe espresso available at select retail locations."

ESPRESSO MAKING TIPS

Preparing the perfect cup of espresso requires teaming up high quality espresso with a good machine. Good espresso starts with fresh coffee beans. Beans that are sealed in pressurized cans are freshest and will deliver the best tasting espresso. Premium espresso should have a consistently balanced flavor, full body and rich aroma -- it should not be bitter.

Grinding the beans is essential to a well-prepared espresso. The beans should be ground to a rather fine powder, measuring about seven grams per cup, which is approximately 1/4 ounce. Illycaffe also recommends using an espresso machine that includes an electric pump. The pump should fill the cup in 20-25 seconds. More time means the grind is too fine. Less time indicates that the ground is too coarse.

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The taste, temperature and pressure of water also influences espresso. Therefore, use non-carbonated mineral water if the machine doesn't have a purifier. To achieve optimum flavor and acid balance, the water, heated by the machine, should be 90 degrees Celsius or 194 degrees Fahrenheit. If the espresso is consistently weak, then the machine is probably operating at a lower water temperature and pressure. Conversely, a strong and bitter espresso indicates high water pressure and temperature which burns the coffee.

The machine should be sufficiently heated before its use. Always keep the filter holder in place on the machine to keep it hot. If the machine is turned on just prior to use, make one extraction without coffee in order to let the hot water run through the machine and filter holder. Espresso cups should also be warmed, either by placing on top of the espresso machine or running under hot water.

Once the machine is heated, wait for the machine's ready light to signal optimum water temperature; it should take three to 10 minutes. Then place seven grams of coffee (approximately 1/4 ounce) into the filter within the "extraction chamber" and activate the irrigation pump.

After its use, the machine should be completely and carefully cleaned -- let water run through the filter with the filter holder in place -- traces of old ground can ruin the taste of the next espresso.

TEST FOR PERFECT ESPRESSO

Often espresso coffee can be judged by looking at the cap. If there's a dark brown cream with a white or black hole, then it's over-extracted and will likely be bitter.

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Conversely, if espresso lacks body and has a light colored cream then it's under-extracted and weak flavored. A perfectly prepared espresso has a strong, rich aroma, very thin cream, and is colored hazel brown with a reddish-tinge. The cream should have a fine mesh of streaks and enough body to support the weight of individual sugar granules.

Illycaffe was founded in 1933 by Francesco Illy. Sixty years and three generations of Illys later, it's still a family-owned tightly run business based in Trieste, Italy. Illycaffe espresso is available at Bloomingdales, Macy's, Williams-Sonoma and other gourmet food shops. Shoppers can also call 1 800 USA-ILLY for nearest locations.

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