



**Daily Shot Of Coffee
Guide To Coffee**

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By Mike Crimmins

Welcome

Welcome to the Daily Shot Of Coffee Guide To Coffee. This guide covers the basics for an average Joe (or Jo) that wants better tasting coffee.

This is the first of what looks like it's going to be many guides that I publish. If you have a topic that you would like me to cover, please email me at mike@dailyshotofcoffee.com

About Me

My name is Mike Crimmins and I'm the chief blogger behind Daily Shot Of Coffee.

I've been a daily coffee drinker since my freshman year of college. (Wow, I feel like I'm at an alcoholics anonymous meeting already). I used coffee to wake up for those 8:30 am classes. I chugged it to stay up until three or four in the morning for those late night study sessions.

After college, when I was working retail, I was known for hiding a cup of coffee just off the sales floor so that I could get a hit of coffee every time I left the sales floor. My friends and family would ask me if I was going to have some coffee with my cream and sugar. My average cup was at least a quarter cream and sugar, leaving my coffee looking cream colored, on the verge of being white.

Then one year for Christmas, my brother bought me a pound of whole beans from Seattle Coffee Works. It opened up a whole new world for me. That was the first time I experienced fresh coffee at home. Not only was it fresh, but it smelled so good that I put the sugar and cream on hold until I tried it black first. I was hooked. I wish I could remember exactly how it tasted, but I can say it was literally life altering. I haven't looked back at Folgers or Maxwell House since.

Things have changed in the past few years since then. My new addiction is brewing my own coffee, using one of the dozen or so coffee gadgets that in my kitchen. Gone are the flavored creamers and sugars, now I like my coffee black so I can identify the flavors and aromas that come naturally from the beans.

I'm not a coffee expert, I just love coffee.

Introduction

A lot of people have asked me questions along the lines of “If I was just getting into coffee now, how would I start out?”

It's the type of question that I know a lot about, because not too long ago I was the guy in the Dunkin' Donuts drive thru ordering coffee with extra cream and sugar. When my dad would see me making a cup of coffee, he would ask “Do you want coffee with your cream and sugar?” I was buying sugar by the pound, almost as often as I was buying coffee. I liked (needed) the caffeine effects that came with coffee, but I didn't really like the taste.

Turns out that it wasn't that hard to go from drinking coffee buried in sugar and cream, to drinking coffee black and enjoying the flavors. In this short guide, I'll go over how you can make that transition (and make it without spending an arm and a leg). Follow the steps in this guide and by the end, I think you'll truly be able to enjoy your coffee.

Section 1: What Kind Of Coffee To Get

Walking into a place that sells coffee, whether it's the grocery store or an independent coffee roaster can be overwhelming when you're new to coffee. There's all these bags of coffee, each with different, often foreign and or technical sounding names.

I remember that feeling all too well, I'd walk into my favorite coffee shop and go eeny, meeny, miny, moe to pick a coffee. However, once I learned a few of the terms, it started to get a whole lot easier. This section will help you get through that overwhelming feeling and guide you to the right kind of coffee for you.

Different kinds of coffee roasts

In my previous life, I always drifted towards darker roasts because they were stronger and I thought packed more of a caffeine punch. Then I learned that the lighter roasts pack all of the caffeine and it rocked my world. Anyone that knows me, knows that I need as much caffeine as I can possibly get in ever sip.

As far as different kind of roasts, I knew that the bean color was determined by the way they were roasted, but that was just about it and I really didn't know what it all meant.

I started to do more research and talked to several coffee "experts" so that I, and now you can get the best tasting cup of coffee.

One of the first things that I learned, is that the darker a bean, the longer it was in the [roaster](#). A darker roast tastes smoother because it has less fiber and has a more sugary flavor.

A lighter roast, that spends less time in a roaster has more caffeine and a stronger flavor because the aromatic oils don't get destroyed during the short roast.

Here's what you need to know so far:

Dark Roasts = Strong And Smooth. Light Roasts = More Flavorful And Chock Full Of Caffeine.

A more in depth look:

The creation of coffee starts with raw or unroasted beans that are green. If you have a coffee roaster, you can roast your own beans and you're probably way too

overqualified to be reading this guide. For the rest of us, green beans are pretty much useless.

Light Roast: The shortest amount of time a bean will spend in the roasting machine. Light roasts are full of flavors and caffeine.

A few examples:

- New England Roast
- Half City Roast
- Cinnamon Roast - The cinnamon roast has a dry surface with no oils and the flavor is light bodied.

Medium Roast: When they keep it in the roaster a little longer, you get a medium roast. It's traditionally a breakfast coffee with good level of acidity and clean finish. It has a balanced body of flavor, between the light roasts and dark roasts. You can find it in grocery stores and is good for drip coffee makers, or other words, it's an every day type of coffee.

- Breakfast Roast - Slightly sweeter than a light roast
- American Roast - Not as dark as European roasts and generally considered to have a good aroma.
- City Roast - Slightly darker than the American Roast

Medium Dark Roast: Beans that are roasted for a longer time are considered a Medium Dark Roast. They're roasted long enough to bring out the natural oil of the coffee to the surface of the bean. They have low levels of caffeine and acidity. They have a bittersweet flavor with a full body. It's commonly used in cafes and coffee shops.

- French Roast - Also goes under the name dark roast. It's used to make espresso.
- Continental Roast - It's slightly lighter and has a spicy body.
- Viennese Roast - It spends slightly longer in the roast than American roast and has a rich, chocolaty body.

Dark Roast: Italian Roast - This bean spends the longest time in the roaster. It's roasted until the bean is almost jet black so it has a smoky, well roasted taste that can mask the natural coffee bean flavor.

One last note, just because they're called French or Italian roasts, doesn't mean that it's actually from there, it's just referring to the type of roast.

Arabica Versus Robusta

(The World Series Of Coffee Beans)

Across the world, more than 30 teams (types) of coffee compete to make it to the world series, also known as the big cup of coffee that wakes us up in the mornings. Two teams, the Arabica beans and the Robusta beans area always on top of the list, accounting for almost all of the coffee consumed across the world. Today, I'm putting them head to head, competing for the championship title.

First up to bat is Robusta, it's cheaper and by far the most common type of coffee sold in grocery stores across America. The reason that it's cheaper is that the cherries stay on the tree after they ripen, requiring less attention from the farmers. Arabica beans require constant supervision because when they ripen, they fall to the ground and spoil. The extra attention comes with an increased price. Count that as one run for Robusta.

Robusta then scores another easy run because they have two times more caffeine.

Robusta also has a greater resistance to climate, weather conditions, disease and heat. It can be grown in lower climates and in larger amounts. Count that as another run for Robusta. They take an early lead of three to nothing.

But this ball game is nowhere near over yet. The bases are loaded and Arabica beans have their star player coming up next.

Arabica beans are found in most coffee shops, because it's better tasting. Coffee made with this type of beans are milder and more aromatic. There's little bitterness and none of the sharp taste that comes with Robusta beans, resulting in coffee that doesn't need to be hidden with heaping spoonfuls of sugar and a flood of creamer. That counts as a four runs, grand slam, it's a walk off victory.

Guide to buying coffee at the grocery store

More than a few people have asked me what are my favorite brands of coffee. I list off a few of my favorite specialty roasters from all over the country. Then they stare blankly at me and almost always follow up with, "But, what can I buy down the street at the grocery store?"

I warn them that buying coffee at the grocery store can end in disaster. Grocery stores often treat their coffee like a commodity, focusing on quantity rather than quality. I tell them that I would much rather buy my coffee at a local roaster or online, but there's

not always a nearby roaster and those shipping charges can add up. That's why I'm sharing some of my tips for buying non-disaster coffee at the grocery store.

Rule Number 1

Avoid ground coffee! Coffee goes stale within fifteen minutes of being ground. It loses its flavor and will taste stale literally in a matter of minutes. Can you imagine how long it's been sitting on that shelf at the grocery store? Buy whole bean coffee and grind it yourself at home.

Rule Number 2

Check for a "roasted on date." Even bags of whole bean coffee can go stale, so you want to try to find one that is preferably less than two weeks old. However, the majority of coffee doesn't have a "roasted on date," most don't even have any date listed on them. However, some have a "best before date." Those "best before dates" are generally a year from the time the beans were roasted. I don't know about you, but I would definitely avoid coffee that is a year old. However, if you look at it the other way, look for a coffee that has recent "best before date" minus a year. In other words, if it says 2/15/13 and today's date is 2/21/12, it should still be reasonably fresh. If it doesn't have any roasted date at all, purchase at your own risk.

Rule Number 3

Check out the organic section of your grocery store. There I've found organic and fair trade coffees from more reputable brands like Jim's Organic Coffee and Green Mountain Coffee Roasters. However, be careful. I've noticed that sometimes the bags of coffee have been sitting there for a long time, long enough to start collecting dust.

Bonus

Avoid the coffee grinders at the store. Who knows what kind of coffee was ground before in it and who knows when the last time they were cleaned. Make the small investment to buy a coffee grinder.

Section 2: How To Improve Your Coffee Experience

How To Clean Your Coffee Maker

When was the last time you cleaned your coffee maker? Last month? Last year? Or never like the old me?

Limescale, mineral deposits and leftover coffee oils build up in coffee makers, corrupting the way our morning brew tastes. Cleaning a coffee maker is easy to do and you'll notice an improved taste in the very next cup of coffee you brew with your clean coffee maker.

There's many ways to clean a coffee maker, I used white vinegar because it was cheap, effective, earth friendly and I had a bottle of it sitting in my cupboard.

- Start by filling your coffee pot with one third vinegar and two thirds cold water.
- Put a filter in your coffee maker.
- Pour the water and vinegar into your coffee maker. Turn it on and let it go through your normal brewing cycle. You may want to open up your windows. My whole house filled with a vinegar aroma.
- After it's done, throw out the filter. I couldn't believe how many tiny pieces of sediments and minerals were caught in the filter.
- Rinse the coffee pot.
- If it was like my coffee maker and still needs more cleaning, repeat the steps again.
- Once your done with the vinegar, repeat the process twice more with just cold water to get rid any remaining odor. If it still smells like vinegar, you can run cool water through it as many time as you need.

Depending on the quality of your water, you should clean your coffee maker anywhere from once a week to once a month for the best tasting coffee.

If you don't want to use vinegar, there are several other alternatives.

You can use two denture cleaning tablets, just make sure they dissolve before you put them into the coffee maker. You can try citric acid mixed with four cups of hot water and four cups of cold water. Also, there's coffee maker cleaning solutions that you can buy.

One thing that you shouldn't use, is soap to clean your coffee pot. You also shouldn't put it in the dishwasher. The soap attaches to the oils deposited by the coffee and can leave the soapy taste behind.

To clean your coffee pot, use ice cubes with a little bit of water. Swirl the ice and water around your coffee pot. If you have some really tough stains, try adding table salt. Just using ice and water wasn't good enough to get all of the stains out of my coffee pot, but the salt worked.

Another thing to try, is putting a glass marble in the water chamber. It attracts mineral deposits in harder water and then you only have to wash the marble once a week, instead of the whole coffee maker.

One warning: This isn't a quick process. It took me over an hour to clean my coffee maker the first time, so if you're in need of caffeine make the coffee now and clean the coffee maker later.

Guide To Coffee grinders

I've been drinking coffee for a big chunk of my life, but using a coffee grinder changed it from a morning ritual to an enjoyable experience. If you want great tasting coffee, sooner or later you're going to have to buy a coffee grinder too.

Ground coffee is popular because it makes brewing coffee very easy, but the problem is that it starts to go stale in minutes. Who knows how long it was sitting on the shelf before you bought it, so the taste results can be hit and miss, with more emphasis on miss.

There's two basic types of grinders – blade and burr. I've owned both. I started with a blade grinder because it was affordable and it got the job done. However, now that I have a burr grinder, I barely use my blade one.

Blade Grinders

Mr. Coffee Electric Coffee Grinder with Chamber Maid Cleaning System
[\\$19.95 from Amazon](#)



Blade grinders use a chopping method to grind the beans into grounds. They're inexpensive, but they can have low quality results. The level of consistency can vary and for the best tasting results, you want consistent grinds. There's also the possibility of getting a burnt taste because of friction between the blades and beans.

Blade grinders are easy to clean and maintain, so they're good for basic use and still an improvement over buying regular ground coffee at the grocery store.

Burr Grinders

There's two different kinds of burr grinders.

Flat Wheel

Flat wheel burr grinders one of the best methods of grinding coffee. The beans are crushed between one semi-concave wheel and one that is stationary. The discs spin slower than with a blade grinder, so the grounds are more even and there's no burnt taste.

Of course, there are some drawbacks. They can be a pain to clean and can get very messy. They can also be very noisy. Some models also have problems with beans getting jammed between the hopper and the grinding area below, requiring extra effort to unjam them.

Conical

Baratza G385 Maestro Plus Coffee Grinder With Pulse Button
[\\$129 from Amazon](#)



Conical grinders are the best of the best, however they are (usually) the most expensive. If you have the budget for one and love great tasting coffee, they're a worthy investment.

They use a conical (cone) shaped grinding device which results in a more consistent grind. They also spin slower than either of the two methods. The result is that there's less problems with friction and static electricity, which causes grinds to get stuck. Therefore, they're a lot easier to clean. Also, they don't usually have problems with clogging. Maybe the best benefit is that they're usually the quietest of all of the methods.

How To Store Your Coffee

Almost as important as buying the right coffee is storing it the right way. Finding the best way to store coffee isn't as easy as I thought it was going to be. As I did research,

I found the answers to be confusing, unreliable and in some cases contradicting of each other. However, the more I studied it, the more it became clear that there are some definite right answers.

The simple and easy answer is that you should store your coffee in an air tight canister at room temperature and out of direct light. Being exposed to air, being too hot or too cold and light all cause coffee to go stale quicker, but that answer is just a little too simple. There's a lot more to it.

The absolute best way to get fresh coffee is to buy green (unroasted) beans because they can last up to a year. However buying green beans means that you have to do the roasting yourself. It's definitely not a simple solution for most people. I want to get into coffee roasting, but I'm nowhere near ready to start doing that...yet.

The second best solution is to buy whole beans. This is something that most people can do at home once you have a grinder like the ones we discussed in the last section. Whole beans last longer than ground coffee, generally 1-2 weeks, allowing you to get fresh coffee every time you grind the coffee.

You can also consider buying from a local roaster who will tell you when the coffee was roasted. That way you know that you're getting freshest beans.

As I already mentioned, you should store your coffee in an air tight canister, but there's a lot of different types of canisters to look at. The popular theory is that a ceramic canister is the best. A canister made of glass can allow light in. A canister made of plastic or metal can actually contaminate the flavor of the coffee. If you can find a ceramic canister with a vacuum seal, that's the best bet. The vacuum seal allows CO₂ that the beans produce out of the container, without letting oxygen in.

Not really a storage tip, but along the same lines. Don't buy more coffee than you need. In the past, I'd buy enough coffee to last as much as a month. Now, I aim to buy only a week or two worth of coffee at a time. The result is fresh, more flavorful coffee.

How Not To Store Your Coffee

Too many people think that the best way to store your coffee is in the freezer. I'll admit that I used to be one of those people.

Storing your coffee in the freezer made sense because I put steaks and fish that I want to last longer in the freezer, so it seemed that it would also work for coffee. However, it turns out that storing your coffee in the freezer is one of the worse things that you can do.

The reason that it doesn't work is because coffee is porous. That's a good thing because it allows the coffee bean to absorb the syrups and flavors that create the taste. However, when it comes to storing coffee in your freezer, it's a bad thing.

The porous nature of coffee allows it to absorb the flavors and smells from other things like the frozen steaks, fish anything else you store in there. There's a handful of good flavored coffees out there, but none are fish flavored coffee.

Not only does it change the flavor, but freezing also causes it to disappear. Freezing breaks down the oils that give coffee it's flavors.

If you needed another reason to not store it in the freezer, the moisture in there causes the actual coffee bean to deteriorate.

It makes sense because you don't buy your coffee in the freezer section at the grocery store and Starbucks down the street doesn't look at all like an ice cream shop (even if there is Starbucks ice cream now).

The same goes for your refrigerator, don't store your coffee in there either. The moisture ruins the coffee and think about all of the smells that you have going on in your fridge – cheeses, vegetables and the leftovers from last night's dinner – not exactly, what I want my coffee tasting like.

Better Coffee With Better Water

One of the easiest ways to get better coffee, is to use better water. It's an easy thing to do, but it's a step that a lot of people skip.

Coffee has this bad habit of absorbing any odors or flavors that it's near, including minerals in the water and chlorine many municipalities use to treat their water. Those minerals are what can give your coffee a bad taste.

I have horrible tasting water, it's extra hard and leaves disgusting calcium stains on my glasses and plates. When I finally got around to buying a water filter, it drastically improved the taste of my coffee. It made me want to kick myself for not getting it sooner.

I choose to get a water filter because it gets rid of many of the impurities, plus it's more environmentally friendly than using bottled water.

To filter my water, I bought a [Culligan Water Filter](#) (FM-15A) through Amazon. It looked nice and simple, plus the price was right. Since then I've also used a [Pur Water Filter](#). I can recommend them both now.

It made the coffee taste smoother and fresher. As far as the water in general, the taste was a whole lot better afterward and it got rid of the hard water odor.

According to the Culligan Water Filter box, it also reduces the chlorine taste and odor, cuts back on sediments, lead, cysts and a whole bunch other things that sound really bad, but I've never heard of before.

Both water filters were easy to install. Even with my lack of handyman skills, I had them setup and flowing with clean water in just a few minutes.

The only drawback is that with filter on, it reduces the pressure. It was a annoying at first, but now I let the coffee pot fill up, while I do other parts of the coffee prep. It's definitely worth the wait for cleaner water and better coffee.

Upgrade To A French Press

A French Press will creates rich, coffee shop tasting coffee at home. I've had people say that French Presses make the best tasting coffee. I have to agree, it brings out flavors that can't be tasted with coffee made from a drip coffee maker.

Step One: Start by boiling your water.

To guarantee the absolute highest amount of freshness, once the water is heating, grind your beans. You'll want a coarse grind, so that they're caught by the filter, keeping as much sediment as possible out of your mug.

Step Two: Remove the top and the filter. Add the grounds into it, two tablespoons for every four to six ounces of water.

First, pour just enough water to cover the grounds, allowing it to bloom and start the

steeping process. Slowly add in the rest of the water, leaving enough room to put the lid and filter back on.

If you want, stir with a wooden or plastic spoon to make the coffee stronger.

Step Three: Put the lid and filter back on.

But don't push down on the filter yet. Let it steep for three to five minutes. I think four minutes is the optimal time, three minutes if you like your coffee on the lighter side, five if you want it stronger.

Step Four: Push the filter down.

Gently push the coffee grounds down to the bottom to separate them from the liquid. Give it a short amount of time for the grounds to settle.

Step Four: Pour it into your coffee mug.

Let it sit for a minute or two, allowing any remaining sediments to filter to the bottom of your mug. Pour any extra coffee into a thermos or carafe. If you keep it in the french press, it'll become over saturated with the grounds, creating a bitter tasting brew.

Step Five: Enjoy you fresh tasting cup of coffee.

French press Tips

No matter how coffee is made, great tasting coffee starts with great tasting water. Using a water filter that attaches to a faucet, is a quick and easy way to improve your coffee.

Leave an inch of space above the waterline for the filter and the press. If you put too much water in and press down too fast, hot water can come squirting out.

The exact time the coffee needs to steep before the press is pushed down varies depending on the kind of coffee beans. Paying attention to aroma is more important. Initially, there's the small of a burst of acidity when the oils are shocked by the heat. The smell is replaced by a building of the body before the acidic smell returns. That's when it should be pressed down or if you're really good, right before it returns.

Clean you french press after your done. Baking soda or denture cleaner tablets are two of the most popular ways. Use the baking sods to scrub the parts or soak the parts in the denture cleaner tablets.

Rinse when you're done, making sure that there's no left over residues from the previous coffee or the cleaning. Take it a step further and use an ultrasonic cleanser once a week. It'll remove sediment, dirt and oil off what looks like a clean french press.

If you like iced coffee, try keeping your french press over night in your fridge. Use cold water and the coffee comes out sweet and clean tasting.

Coffee For Non-Coffee Drinkers

Since I started DailyShotOfCoffee.com, I've had many non-coffee drinkers, tea fanatics and hot chocolate fans ask me for coffee suggestions. I'm probably the wrong person to ask. I took the long, scenic route to find delicious tasting coffee, but here are my suggestions.

For Hot Chocolate Drinkers

I'd recommend starting by ordering a White Mocha at the local coffee shop. It's an espresso with steamed milk, mixed with white chocolate syrup and served with white whipped cream. The sweetness really hides the espresso taste.

Similar, is the Mochaccino at the major coffee shop chains. It's an espresso, steamed chocolate milk, foam from steamed milk, topped with whipped cream, chocolate powder and chocolate syrup drizzle on top. You can't get much closer to a hot chocolate without taking away the espresso.

If they actually want to taste the coffee, but still want something that isn't overwhelming, they can try a Cafe Au Lait, which is simply espresso and milk.

For Tea Drinkers

I'd recommend reading this article at I Need Coffee called "[A Coffee Lover's Guide To Tea](#)." It can easily be switched around to help tea fans find coffees with similar qualities.

An example from it, is if they like Earl Gray tea, they should try Kenyan, Zimbabwean or Ethiopian Harrar coffees.

If they like China Rose Petal tea, Kona and Brazilian coffees have some of the same qualities.

If they like green tea like Jasmine Blossom, Sumatra is the region that they'll want to check out.

Using cream and sugar is perfectly acceptable, but it does hide a lot of the rich flavors that contain the true coffee experience, but it's still a good way to start.

Closing

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. If you follow these steps, you can easily make better tasting coffee.

If you run into any problems, have any questions or want me to go into more depth about a particular topic, feel free to email me via mike@dailyshotofcoffee.com.

Also, you can connect with Daily Shot Of Coffee via [Facebook](#), [Google Plus](#) or [Twitter](#). Wherever you're hanging out, I'm probably there, talking coffee.