



Homemade Vanilla Extract

Large Batch

1	750 ml bottle of Vodka
12	whole vanilla beans
	Dark Rum (optional)

Pour some of the vodka into a glass...add orange juice (or mix of choice) and drink.

Cut vanilla beans open – you can either slice them down the middle lengthwise being careful to keep them whole with just one side split open, or you can use kitchen scissors to cut them from one end to the other, being careful not to cut them entirely in half – leave them connected at one end.

Drop the vanilla beans into the bottle of vodka (the vanilla beans will displace some of the vodka; you'll need to remove some of it...hence the reasoning for drinking some first!)

Close the bottle and shake. Place bottle in a cool dark place, taking it out to shake once or twice a day for the first month. The longer you let it sit, the better the extract is. You can add a shot of dark rum if you want your vanilla to have an extra little 'kick', but not required.

You can start to use your vanilla extract any time after the second month, but it truly does get better and better the longer it allows the vanilla beans to infuse into the vodka. Recommended wait-time is 6 months.

Once you start using your homemade vanilla extract, you won't ever want to go back to store-bought. It's so much better! As you use it, you can top off the bottle with more vodka (or rum) to keep it full – the vanilla beans will continue to infuse. You can keep and use it indefinitely.

Great as a gift-giving idea – you can transfer your large batch into small (preferably dark) bottles, place a sliced/cut vanilla bean in the bottle, tie a bow with raffia around the neck and make a custom label.



Homemade Vanilla Extract

Individual Jars

For *each* 2-ounce jar of vanilla extract you will need:

1	2-ounce vanilla jar
	slightly less than 1/4 cup vodka
1 tablespoon	dark rum
1	vanilla bean

Combine the vodka and rum.

Using either a funnel or a measuring cup with a pouring spout, add alcohol to the (washed and dried) vanilla jar.

Cut the vanilla bean in half lengthwise, either split open with a sharp knife or cut with kitchen scissors. Be sure to leave about an inch connected (not cut) at one end if you're cutting with scissors.

Push the cut vanilla bean down into the jar. Close lid tightly. Add twine, raffia or ribbon, and stick on a pretty hand-lettered or printed label if you choose (and particularly if you are planning to give your jars as gifts).

Store the jar(s) for two months in a cool, dry place (like a kitchen cabinet that is away from the oven). Be sure

to shake the jar every so often, not necessarily every day, but when you think about it. The mixture will get darker and darker over time. The extract will be ready in two months, and will remain good for *years*.

Vanilla extract is actually like fine red wine, it gets better with age! So you can keep vanilla extract essentially *indefinitely*. That is, of course, if you keep it in a cool, dry, relatively dark place. Like any other 'flavor product', the flavor will degrade if exposed to extreme or variant temperatures, moisture or direct sunlight. Whatever you do, do *not* put the vanilla beans or vanilla extract into the refrigerator or freezer. If you do that, you might as well put it directly into the garbage can. *I'm just sayin'*. The best 'rule of thumb' is to treat your vanilla extract like a fine liqueur. The best part about the entire process is, so long as you throw a few more beans in occasionally and top off the alcohol as needed, you've got a perpetual source of rich and fresh vanilla extract.

Hints and Tips: When cutting the vanilla beans, I usually do the same process I do for making Kahlua...slice through with a sharp knife (carefully, you don't need to add any fingertips to your extract...):



Vanilla Beans: The best place I've found fresh, quality vanilla beans at a great price is eBay. There are some other places you can find them online - which is also good, but if you do a search on eBay for Madagascar Vanilla Beans, the power sellers that I buy from are selling quality product. It's definitely much better than buying a single vanilla bean in the grocery store at an exorbitant price - not to mention usually they're a bit on the dry side.

Bottles: The best bottles to store your vanilla extract in are the dark ones. Amber is typical, you want as little light to get to your mix as possible. Vanilla extract comes in amber bottles - you can save your old ones and have your friends and family save theirs and then wash them out and reuse them, or you can find them and buy them in bulk at reasonable prices online. Just do a Google search on 'Amber Bottles' and you'll see a myriad of places that you can buy from without a minimum order. That's the best way to go for brand new bottles.

Vodka or Rum: Someone asked me about the importance of the quality of Vodka in the Kahlua - it's the same for both Kahlua and Vanilla Extract. *Quality matters*. If you use a bitter-tasting vodka or grain alcohol in either, you're going to end up with some bitter qualities in your end product. So quality *definitely* matters. That doesn't mean you have to go out and buy the most expensive kind out there, just be educated on what is quality, and what would generally be drunk from a brown paper bag. I think you can probably figure it out.

Decorating the Bottles: I saw this online once and saved the image because I thought it was cool and something I might try in the future:



There you have it...go forth and make some vanilla extract! Enjoy the creativity!