

# Introduction to Coffee Cupping

Coffee cupping, or coffee tasting, is the practice of observing the tastes and aromas of brewed coffee. It is a professional practice but can be done informally by anyone or by professionals known as "Q Graders". A standard coffee cupping procedure involves deeply sniffing the coffee, then loudly slurping the coffee so it spreads to the back of the tongue.

The coffee taster attempts to measure aspects of the coffee's taste, specifically the body (the texture or mouthfeel, such as oiliness), sweetness (the perceived sweetness at the sides of the tongue), acidity (a sharp and tangy feeling at the tip of the tongue, like when biting into an orange), flavour (the characters in the cup), and aftertaste. Since coffee beans embody telltale flavours from the region where they were grown, cuppers may attempt to identify the coffee's origin.

A coffee cupping spoon is a type of spoon used primarily for coffee cupping, or tasting. The spoons are designed to hold coffee samples for tasting, with a deep bowl shape to facilitate slurping.

## Scoring Coffee Cupping

Scoring is an important part of coffee cupping, and it involves assigning numerical ratings to different aspects of the coffee's taste. The Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) has a detailed scoring system that is widely used in the industry. The SCA's scoring system evaluates coffee on a scale from 0 to 100, based on aspects such as fragrance, flavor, aftertaste, acidity, body, balance, uniformity, clean cup, sweetness, and overall impression.

Each of these categories is scored on a scale from 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating better quality. The scores are then added up to give the coffee's total score. A coffee that scores 80 points or above on the SCA's scale is graded as "specialty coffee".

It's important to note that scoring is subjective and can vary between cuppers. However, the SCA's scoring system provides a standardized framework that helps ensure consistency and fairness in the evaluation process.

## Preparing for Coffee Cupping

Proper preparation is key to a successful coffee cupping session. This involves selecting high-quality, freshly roasted beans; using clean, neutral water; and ensuring that the coffee is brewed correctly. The coffee should be ground to a size similar to that used in a French press, and the water should be heated to just below boiling.

The coffee is then steeped in the water for a few minutes, after which a crust forms on the surface. This crust is broken by the cupper, who inhales the aroma and then removes the remaining crust. The coffee is then allowed to cool slightly before tasting.

It's also important to cleanse the palate between tastings, usually with water or a neutral food like bread. This helps prevent the flavors of one coffee from affecting the perception of the next.

## **Tasting and Evaluating Coffee**

The actual tasting process in coffee cupping involves slurping the coffee in order to spray it across the palate. This allows all the taste buds to experience the coffee, and it helps the cupper evaluate aspects such as acidity, body, and flavor. The coffee is then spit out, rather than swallowed, to avoid caffeine intake.

Each coffee is usually tasted multiple times as it cools, since the flavors can change significantly with temperature. The cupper uses a spoon to take samples from different parts of the cup, ensuring a representative tasting.

After tasting all the coffees, the cupper assigns scores to each one. These scores are then used to rank the coffees and identify the highest quality offerings.

## **Conclusion**

Coffee cupping is a complex and nuanced process, but it's also an essential tool for anyone involved in the coffee industry. It allows producers, buyers, and roasters to evaluate coffee quality, identify the best beans, and ensure a great tasting experience for the end consumer.

While it takes time and practice to develop the skills needed for coffee cupping, anyone can learn the basics and start exploring the world of coffee flavors. Whether you're a coffee professional or just a passionate enthusiast, cupping can deepen your appreciation for this remarkable beverage.

Remember, the goal of cupping is not just to judge the coffee, but to understand it. So take your time, pay attention to the details, and most importantly, enjoy the process.