

A Coffee Taster's Glossary

Acidity

High acid (or acidity) coffees have a sharp, pleasing, piquante quality that points up their *flavor* and gives them snap, verve, liveliness in the cup. Acidity may be high, medium, light, low, or lacking altogether in coffees, in which case the coffee tastes *flat* and dull. Acidity is characteristic of high-grown coffees. See *sour*.

Aroma

Refers to the odor of the prepared coffee beverage. It may be lacking, faint, delicate, moderate, strong, or fragrant (also called aromatic), and distinctive as to character.

Baked

A taste description given to underroasted coffee, or coffee roasted too slowly at too low a temperature, so that the flavor is underdeveloped. See *green*.

Bitter

A harsh, unpleasant taste detected on the back of the tongue. Found in overextracted brews as well as in overroasted coffees and those with various taste defects.

Body

The tactile impression of weight and texture in the mouth. Coffees may be watery, *thin*, slight, light, medium, full, heavy, thick or even sirupy in body, as well as *buttery*, oily, *rich*, smooth, chewy, etc., in texture. Easiest to detect in full-strength coffee.

Burnt

A *bitter*, burnt flavor characteristic of dark-roasted coffees.

Buttery

Said of an oily *body* or *texture* in the mouth. Denotes full flavor and rich

Cinnamon

Underlying spice accent sometimes detected in the *aroma* of fine coffee, a *flavor* nuance. Not a common description. (Also, a term describing a very light roast).

Clean

Opposite of *dirty*. Characteristic of all fine coffees. Does not necessarily imply clarity of flavor impression (see *natural coffee* and *wild*). Associated with washed coffees.

Cocoa

Characteristic sweetish smell of completely *stale* roasted coffee. See *stale*.

Dirty

An undesirable unclean smell and taste, slight to pronounced. Dirty implies a defect, such as sourness, earthiness, or mustiness. See *natural coffee* and *wild*.

Earthy

A highly undesirable dirt odor and flavor taint picked up by coffee when dried on the ground; also called groundy. See *musty*.

Flat

A dull lifeless quality due to lack of *acidity*.

Flavor

(a) The total impression of *aroma*, *acidity*, and *body*; if the impression is strong, fine, and pleasant, the coffee is described as flavory or flavorful or ranked on a scale from poor, fair, good, to fine-flavored.
(b) Specific taste flavors may suggest, spices, chocolate, nuts, or something less complimentary - straw, grass, earth, rubber etc.

Fresh

Opposite of *stale*. Applies to roasted coffees.

Fruity

A *flavor* taint said to come from overripe fruit pulp.

A Coffee Taster's Glossary

Grassy

A *flavor* taint from use of swamp water for washing, or from improper drying. Also used as synonym for *green* and *past-croppish*.

Green

- (a) A *flavor* taint found in coffee harvested before fully ripe.
- (b) Characteristic taste of underroasted coffee; *pasty*.

Hard

Opposite of *sweet* or mild; *harsh*. Description of Brazils between *soft* and *Rio-y*.

Harsh

Crude raw taste; used to describe certain Brazils and *robustas*.

Hidy

Smell of hides or leather from improper storage.

Light

Used to qualify *aroma*, *acidity*, or *body*; a light coffee would be delicate in flavor.

Mellow

Full, well-balance, satisfying coffee; implies low or medium *acidity*. See *winy*.

Musty

A smell and taste taint caused by mildew; similar to *earthy*.

Natural coffee

Aroma and *flavor* characteristics of coffees processed by the dry method. They are often blander than washed coffees and may lack clarity of *flavor* and pointed *acidity*; some may have intense complex flavors and full, thick body. See *wild*.

Neutral

A characterless, flavorless coffee, inoffensive to insipid; without virtue (safe for economical blending) but without defect. A desirable character in *robusta* and otherwise undistinguished Brazils.

Nutty

- (a) Said of coffees that lack coffee *flavor*; also *peanutty*.
- (b) A specific *flavor* nuance, suggesting almonds, and so on.

Past-croppish

Not to be confused with *stale*. Said of coffees that have deteriorated in the green state before roasting and thus taste as if from a past crop. See *strawy* and *woody*.

Rancid

Extremely *sour* and very unpleasant.

Rich

Indicates depth and complexity of *flavor* and full, *buttery* body; overused.

Rio-y

A *harsh*, heavy medicinal or iodine *flavor* typical of the poorest grades of Brazils but encountered in other coffees as well. Said to be caused by allowing berries to dry on the tree.

Rubbery

Burnt-rubber odor characteristic of *robusta*.

Soft

Low-acid coffees are described as soft, *mellow*, *sweet*.

Sour

Not to be confused with *acidity*. A distinctly *sour*, rank, or *rancid* taste is a defect, often due to improper processing. See *wild*.

Spicy

Said of fine *aroma* or *flavor* suggestive of spices.

A Coffee Taster's Glossary

Stale

Roasted coffee that has faded in quality after excessive exposure to air. Aroma of stale coffee changes from *flat* to *rancid* and finally to cocoa-like; the flavor of stale coffee changes from *bitter* to *rancid* and tastes cardboardy. Not to be confused with *past-croppish*.

Strawy

Characteristic scent of *past-croppish* coffees; hay-like. See *woody*.

Strong

Term used to indicate intensity of either defects or virtues (as in "a strong, sour taste" or "a strong, fine aroma"). A strong-flavored coffee is therefore not necessarily a fine-flavored coffee.

Sweet

Said of a smooth, palatable coffee, free from taints or harshness. Also *soft*.

Thin

Said of coffees with watery body and lack of *flavor*; typical if low-grown coffee.

Wild

Coffees with extreme *flavor* characteristics, or odd racy, tangy nuances in *aroma* and taste. Usually applied to *natural coffees*. These characteristics may be intriguing or undesirable. See *dirty*.

Winy

Sometimes used to indicate thick *body* and mellow quality, but also used to denote a sappy, vinous *acidity*. Characteristic of certain fine coffees.

Woody

A flavor taint caused by overlengthy storage in warm wood sheds; also characteristic scent and taste of old, *past-croppish* coffees.