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The Dirt on Succulents

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I started making my own vanilla extract more than a decade ago. I didn't set out to be frugal or to make a better product. I did it because it's what you do when someone in your family suddenly has food allergies. Necessity really is the mother of invention. Little did I know that I would indeed save money, make a better product, and forever choose to eschew purchasing store bought vanilla extract.

After our family was faced with the new prospect of eating and baking around food allergies, I began to look more closely at every ingredient in our pantry. One of the baking staples I had a terrible time finding ingredient information and allergy warnings for was vanilla extract. Many companies that produce vanilla extract also make almond and other nut based extracts, making their products off limits for my family. In my hours of searching online, I made a wonderful discovery. I learned that making vanilla extract required only two additional ingredients, a glass bottle, and a bit of cupboard space. It didn't take me very long to decide to create our own vanilla extract right in our kitchen.

I was a little skeptical. The process seemed too simple to yield a vanilla extract that would be as fragrant and flavorful as the premium extract I kept on hand in

our kitchen. I had very little to lose, so I gathered the supplies, followed the easy steps, and set the glass bottle aside to see what would develop.

With each passing day, the clear liquid took on a deeper color. Every time I gently turned the bottle to help mix the contents, I marveled at the specks of vanilla bean floating about in the liquid. After a few weeks, the vodka no longer smelled of alcohol, but of

vanilla. As the weeks turned into one month and then a second, the extract became dark amber in color, the fragrance was deep and earthy, and the flavor was exceptional. This homemade vanilla extract had exceeded my high expectations in every single way. Years have passed since I made that first batch, but my practice of making homemade vanilla extract has continued. Once you make your own, you may never purchase vanilla extract at the store again.

Making your own vanilla extract puts you in complete control of the final product. You can choose the quality of the ingredients and determine the strength of your extract. Making your own extract can also be a real money saver. For the price of a small bottle of premium extract from the store, you can create a steady supply of your own extract to use in your family's favorite recipes.

Brewing a bottle full of delicious homemade vanilla extract is as simple as making a cup of tea. You'll need to gather a glass container with a tight fitting lid, vanilla bean pods, and vodka or bourbon. While I have used both vodka and bourbon, I prefer the vanilla extract made with vodka. If you use bourbon, resulting extract will be equally delicious with a bit darker color and a slightly more intense aroma.

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When making vanilla extract, I like to use four ounce or eight ounce glass bottles with a rubber gasket and swing lid to keep them tightly closed. I find that this tight fitting lid helps to prevent the extract from evaporating. For a four ounce bottle of extract, I use two vanilla bean pods. For an eight ounce bottle, I use four vanilla bean pods.

To make your extract, use a sharp knife to carefully split each vanilla bean lengthwise or cut them into lengths about two inches long. Place the beans in the clean empty bottle. Warm the vodka or bourbon as if you were making a cup of tea before adding it to the bottle. Allow the mixture to steep uncovered until it has cooled to room temperature. Replace the stopper or tight fitting lid before storing the bottle in a cool, dark place. I store my bottles of vanilla extract in the same cabinet with my olive oil as they thrive in similar conditions.

Gently agitating the bottle occasionally will help to distribute the vanilla beans throughout the liquid and facilitate the brewing process of the extract. In four to eight weeks, you will have a rich, delicious vanilla extract ready to use in your recipes. The longer the extract is allowed to brew, the more intense the flavor, color, and aroma will become.

When you reach the end of the first bottle of extract, you can refill it with warm vodka or bourbon and set it aside to brew a second time using the same vanilla bean pods. The second batch is often a bit lighter in color, but should be no less flavorful or aromatic. After the vanilla bean pods have brewed two batches of extract, they can be used to flavor custards and sauces or allowed to dry slightly before adding to a mason jar full of sugar to create a batch of delicious vanilla bean sugar.

VANILLA SUGAR

To make a batch of vanilla bean sugar, simply tip the vanilla bean pods out of the empty bottle on to a paper towel or clean tea towel. Allow them to dry for several hours before placing them in a large Mason jar, covering them with granulated sugar, and placing a lid on the jar. In a matter of days, you will open the jar to find the sugar has been infused with the aroma and flavor of the vanilla bean pods. This vanilla bean sugar is a delicious addition to your baked goods. I sprinkle it on top of muffins, sugar cookies, and my morning cappuccino.

No matter how you choose to use your homemade vanilla extract, you're sure to enjoy its rich amber color, intense flavor, and delightful aroma as much as I do. You'll be amazed at how delicious your favorite recipes taste with the addition of your homemade vanilla extract and vanilla bean sugar.

If you'd like to purchase a kit to make the process easier, I sell one in [my etsy store](#).

Jennifer spends her days living and writing at 1840 Farm with three generations of her family and their dogs, chickens, ducks, goats, and rabbit. She loves to create homegrown recipes in their farmhouse kitchen and dream up new handmade products for their [Etsy Shop](#). You can follow their daily adventures on [Facebook](#) and enjoy a collection of homemade recipes on their [blog](#).