

CROSSROADS

CROSSROADS Language Studio's Newsletter February, 2024

Vanilla

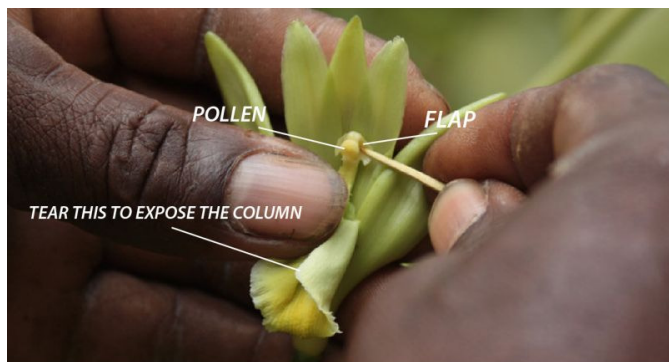


Vanilla is one of the most recognisable spices in the world. Mexico's Totonac indigenous people were the first to use the pods for their sweet aroma.

Vanilla is an orchid species, naturally growing only in the jungles of Central America. It is a highly specialised plant that requires a specific fungus to trigger seed germination, a tree for the vine to grow on, and a unique species of bee to naturally pollinate the flower.

When the Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes visited the Aztecs, in 1519, he was the first to introduce the vanilla pods to the Old Continent. From then on, the spice exploded in popularity across the world, with every empire trying to grow and trade in it. However, because of the orchid's specialised nature, it proved impossible to pollinate and grow fruits from the plant, thus bringing the price of dried vanilla pods to astronomical prices. In 2018, 1kg of the spice reached its all-time peak of 83,000yen, more valuable than silver, at that time!

It took farmers around the world more than 300 years of attempts at pollination to finally discover that each flower has, in fact, both male and female parts. Manually touching them together guarantees a successful pollination. The news of this technique immediately spread across the globe, and soon the markets were flooded with vanilla spice.



Simultaneously, an artificial vanilla was created and currently only 1% of all vanilla used is of the natural origin, on account of its outrageous cost.



To meet the insatiable demand for the plant, and in search of more affordable sources of vanillin – the crystals that contain the aroma compound - scientists have discovered that beavers (yes, beavers!) produce a musky substance, castoreum, under their tail, that smells almost exactly like vanilla. With a bit of clever chemistry, a synthesised vanilla was created, based on that substance, thus drastically reducing the costs of production and offering a convincing alternative to labour-intensive, finicky orchid. However, this practice of extracting castoreum has long been abandoned, as advances in chemistry made it possible to make vanillin without an intervention of animals or the vanilla plant itself.

These days, vanilla is widely used for various commercial applications. Of course, it is primarily used in confectionery products, such as ice creams, cakes and beverages, and it also features heavily in the perfume industry. Their sweet aroma is also used to effectively conceal certain undesirable smells of goods commonly found around us, for example car tires, paint and house cleaning agents.

Vanilla has other very practical, albeit obscure uses. As it happens, spiders really dislike vanilla! If you cannot bear the sight and presence of these critters in your house, spread some vanilla beans around windows and gaps in the doors and they'll never bother you again.

Do you enjoy vanilla ice cream? I sure do!



Article by Marek

Net News

NET LESSONS: Too busy to come to CROSSROADS?

.... Try our *lessons on the net!*

For more information, try this website:

<https://matadornetwork.com/read/artificial-vanilla-extract/>

Some Thoughts for the Month



Joshua Says: I am convinced, climate change is for real! It's now the middle of February, usually the "coldest" month of the year, but this year, February feels like Spring! And last summer was stifling! I used to hate winter while warm summers seemed only natural to me. Not any more! The way the climate is changing, I'll take "winter" any time!

Junko Says: Rapidly advancing AI will be more deeply integrated into our daily lives in the future. Here are some ideas on how AI will develop in the next 10 years: working alongside humans assisting in various complex tasks, getting more involved in healthcare with faster, more accurate diagnoses, becoming more context-aware, grasping connotation and nuances more accurately, etc. – and, how to prevent AI technology from replacing people! AI ethics is being regularly discussed internationally.



Marek Says: If you ever wonder whether you should be buying a real vanilla extract or not, here's food for thought for you! First, a natural extract is always dark brown in colour and will have a slightly more complex flavour than the artificial one. Second, the artificial vanilla is mostly made from clove oil and wood smoke. They are natural sources of guaiacol, the same chemical compound, that gives vanilla its unmistakable flavour and aroma.

Mandcy dit: Joyeuse Saint-Valentin à tous ! Avez-vous mangé beaucoup de chocolats? Personnellement, j'en ai mangé beaucoup beaucoup beaucoup beaucoup!!! Connaissez-vous l'expression "avoir des papillons dans le ventre"? Cela signifie que quand on aime quelque chose ou quelqu'un beaucoup, on ressent une étrange sensation dans le ventre. Avez-vous déjà ressenti cela? Personnellement, c'est sûrement devant un bon gâteau au chocolat !!



ACROSS

- 1 hard to see, unclear
- 4 being the most important
- 5 distinctive one-of-a-kind
- 7 a type of smell
- 8 grow or sprout (from seeds, etc)
- 9 by hand
- 12 over fussy about details
- 14 greatly exceeding normal limits
- 15 left behind, given up
- 16 usages
- 17 at this time, now
- 19 two or more parts mixed together
- 20 unbelievably large

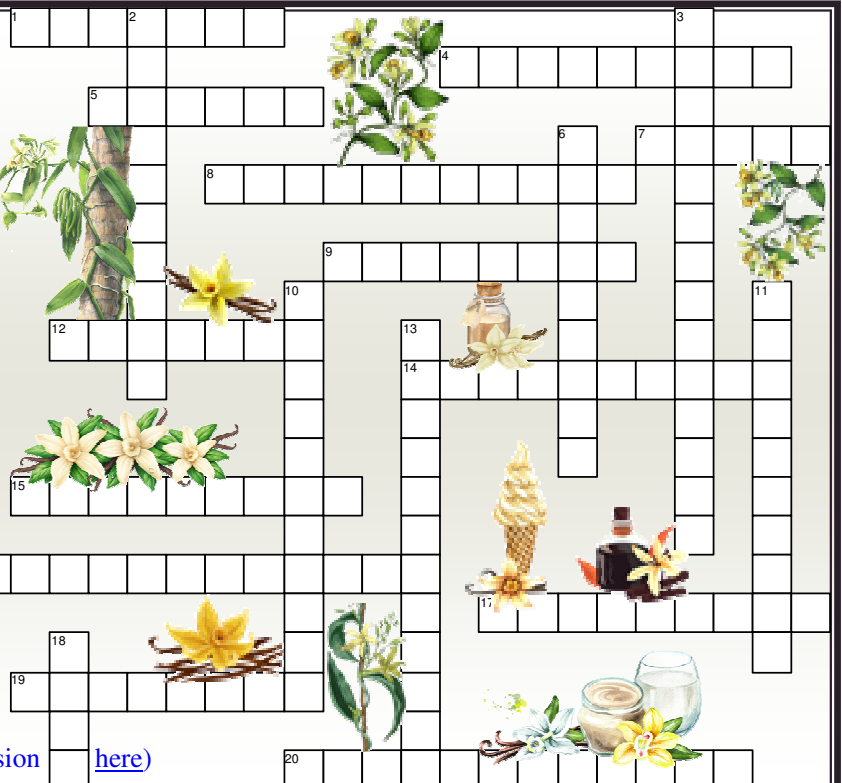
Play A Game!

Find the answers on P1

DOWN

- 2 persuasive, believable
- 3 at the same time
- 6 to fertilize a flowering plant
- 10 created artificially
- 11 impossible to satisfy
- 13 a Spanish adventurer
- 18 they contain the seeds of plants

(print version [here](#))

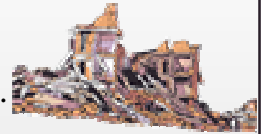


Homonyms have the same pronunciation but have different meanings and are often spelt differently, such as to, too or two. The sentences below can be completed by filling in two homonyms in the spaces provided.. The list below contains one word from each homonym pair you'll need in each sentence.

1. He _____ the ball _____ the window.



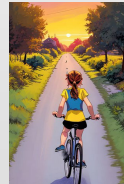
2. The _____ where the building stood was a terrible _____ after the explosion.



3. The _____ made an emergency landing in the middle of the _____.



4. The soldier _____ to defend the _____.



5. She _____ along the _____ for twenty kilometers.

6. It's only made of stainless _____, so I don't think anyone will _____ it.



7. You have to _____ the _____ answers on the test sheet.



8. If you come _____ and listen, you'll _____ everything.



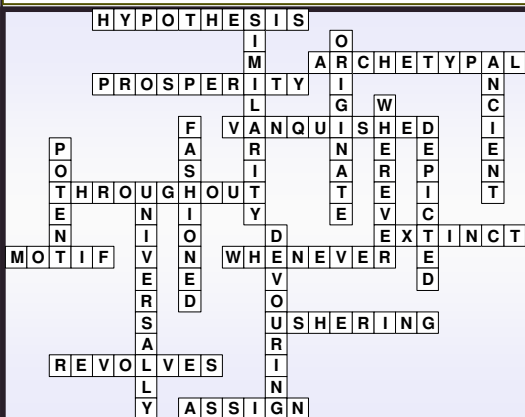
9. They _____ their uniforms throughout the _____.



10. You'll have to _____. There's a _____ limit of 250kg on this lift.



steel fort through write weight hear wore rode plain sight



Last Month's puzzle Solution

ACROSS

- 1 based mostly on theory
- 4 original or basic type
- 6 financial well-being
- 9 defeated
- 12 the whole extent, everywhere
- 15 no longer existing
- 16 recurring theme in art or music
- 17 at every time
- 18 leading into
- 19 goes around or centered on
- 20 give a specific task

DOWN

- 2 having nearly the same characteristics
- 3 bring into being
- 5 belonging to times long past
- 7 in any place
- 8 made artistically
- 10 represented as a drawing or sketch
- 11 having great influence
- 13 in every case, common to all
- 14 consuming, eating



Don't forget... Our SPECIAL 1+1 Campaign offer! Up to 50% off!!

See our notice board, or ask Junko in our office, for the details.