

NATIONAL POST

Thursday, June 25, 2009

Brew the perfect coffee, just like Juan Valdez

Presented by

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Albeiro Lopera / Reuters / Colombia Valdez Coffee

Fifty-six grams.

That was the exact weight of the coffee beans put into a coffee grinder by Melanie Breitreutz, a guru I sought out in search of the secret to brewing the perfect cup o' morning joe. Actually, four steaming cups of dark-brown deliciousness.

Anyone who has ever had bad coffee knows why this mission was so important. Unless you're using instant coffee, which is to coffee-lovers what wine in a box is to sommeliers, you're in danger of serving this sacrilege. Watery. Sludge-bottomed. Burned. Stale. They're all an affront to tastebuds and Juan Valdez's counterparts around the world.

In cowboy times, messing up the coffee could get you horsewhipped by your grumpy posse. Today, it will earn you dirty looks and Maxwell House mockery from the caffeine-dependent.

Everybody has their own tastes, so if you have a recipe and routine that you prefer, great. But there are unbendable rules for making good coffee, such as not storing coffee in your fridge for more than a few weeks, let alone the years some, ahem, well-meaning tea drinkers have been known to keep their coffee stash for guests. (And never grind your coffee before storing, as ground coffee starts losing its flavour within an hour.)

Bad coffee-making happens all the time, says Russ Prefontaine, who owns Fratello Coffee Company with his brothers Jason and Chris. The brothers roast premium coffee beans from around the world at their shop and factory in southeast Calgary.

But no matter how exquisite their freshly roasted beans might be, bad brewing will make them into so much Nescafe, he adds.

Many amateur baristas brew coffee in a way that washes away the distinctive flavours of a coffee bean. Then there's people like my mom, who have no idea how much coffee to add per cup.

So I went to Fratello and got the goods on making great coffee from Breitreutz, a coffee addict whose Be'ato Coffee company distributes premium coffees roasted at Fratello to online consumers.

To start, you'll need a few pieces of equipment (available at many department stores and at beato.ca): a French coffee press, also known as a Bodum (\$30 to \$60); a small electronic scale for measuring coffee (\$20 to \$30); a timer (\$5 and up); and a burr coffee grinder (\$150 to \$2,000). Once you're equipped, here's how to make a proper pot of coffee, courtesy of Breitreutz:

1. Pour into a measuring cup about 1 tablespoon (14 grams) of coffee beans per cup of water you use - weigh it on the electronic scale to be sure.
2. Grind your coffee to a coarse/heavy grind. Using a finer grind of coffee can cause the filter to clog and also produce a bitter coffee.
3. Hold your French press firmly and pull the plunger-lid out.
4. Place the ground coffee into the press.
5. Pour boiling water over the coffee grounds, leaving at least an inch (2.5 centimetres) of space at the top.
6. Stir the coffee mixture.
7. Place the plunger-lid on top of the French press, turning the pour spout to the side.
8. Let your coffee sit in the hot water for four minutes, then press down the coffee plunger.
9. Turn the lid to open the pour spout and pour yourself a cup of coffee.

A few more quick tips to help you start off with good coffee:

-Buy your beans from a local coffee roaster or distributor (or buy them green and roast your own, but that's some advanced joe-makin'), and use them within a month of roasting for the best flavour.

-Store coffee beans in the freezer to keep them fresh longer.

If you want to learn more - and believe me, the world of coffee is just as fascinating as the world of wine - a great book for coffee rookies is *I Love Coffee: Over 100 Easy and Delicious Coffee Drinks*, by Susan Zimmer (Andrews McMeel Publishing LLC, \$20.95).

Considering all the work that went into getting those coffee beans from a tree halfway around the world to your door, the least you could do is finish off the job right.

Besides, your tastebuds - and that cute house guest - will thank you.

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