

# COFFEE.

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## CURING OF COFFEE.

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The following article on "Curing of Coffee" extracted from a Booklet on "Coffee Cultivation" by H. Q. Levy, is taken from the *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society*, Vol. XXX., No. 6:—

The correct curing of coffee to the novice or the slipshod planter, appears an elaborate process, but in reality is a simple process and easily acquired, and if persisted in becomes second nature. A strict adherence to small details is essential to success, and the non-observance of apparently little things has led to the failure and disappointment of many.

Coffee may be cured in three ways, viz:—"Parchment," "Chum," and "Wholeshell," but there is only one process which will secure you the top price, and this is by the system known as Parchment. All three systems require the berries to be gathered cherry ripe.

To produce the best parchment coffee I recommend the following process: A fair supply of clean soft water (rain water in preference, collected or stored above the pulper and allowed to run by gravity into it), a pulper either native made or imported, a fermenting as well as a washing cistern, constructed of wood or cement, if of the latter the surface must be rubbed smooth to prevent the abrasion of the parchment, the sizes depending on the quantity of pulped coffee to be handled and the amount of water available; if plenty of water, the larger the washing cistern the better; the fermenting one should be kept to a size to allow the heaping of the pulped berries; next a wooden rake for stirring the coffee while washing it, and last a smooth barbecue or barbecues faced with either good lime mortar or cement, but better still one constructed of well cured hardwood lumber; the boards must not possess any pungent or distinctive odour, such as cedar, mahoe or pitch-pine, as the natural aroma of the cured sample will be affected for some time until by the effect of weathering of the boards they lose their odour.

Each day's picking should be pulped the same evening, falling into the fermenting cistern where it is allowed to remain in a heap for at least 48 hours. If the weather be very cold, it will be found necessary to let it remain some time longer, at any rate until sufficient heat is developed in the centre so that you can insert your hand without undue discomfort; it is well to turn the heap occasionally, *i.e.*, about once each 12 hours, so that all the berries may get the same amount of fermentation.

The cistern must contain an outlet to allow all surplus water to escape from the heap, otherwise a very slow and poor fermentation will take place. I have often seen the freshly pulped coffee totally submerged in water and allowed to remain there overnight: this is an incorrect procedure, as sufficient

heat cannot be developed to set up an active fermentation, the only means by which the full aroma of the finished produce can be attained. After thorough fermentation, transfer the "beans" to the washing cistern and totally immerse in clean water, in fact the water should be 4 to 6 inches above the level of the mass. Allow the beans to remain a few hours in the water, then stir well with the wooden rake, renewing the water 3 or 4 times until no "gummy" matter remains adhering to the parchment. Before running off each lot of water skim off all light beans and bits of skin floating on top, keep all these skimmings and cure separately from the main lot. After this washing operation is completed and the water thoroughly drained, remove to the barbecue and start drying.

Particular factors to remember in drying parchment coffee are these—never allow it to get wet after being once partially dry; next, it must be dried slowly; this slow drying brings out, and allows the cured berry to retain the "blue" colour so desirable in good coffee; it also fixes the aroma to a great extent. A very hot barbecue is detrimental. Four to five hours per day of medium sun until the coffee is three-quarters dry is the procedure advised; after that it may be dried more quickly: once it is thoroughly dry it will not be again affected by very hot sun.

It is not possible to obtain a good sample of coffee if dried in an "earth" barbecue, the earth transmits to the berry an extraneous aroma which can never be eradicated, neither should it be dried or stored near smoke or any article having a distinctive odour, such as tobacco, pimento, annatto or salted fish stuffs. Coffee will permanently assimilate any such foreign odours, and transmit it to the concocted beverage.

The advantages of curing coffee in the parchment are as follows:—It is the only form of curing which will give you the true aroma; it can be dried in a shorter period than any of the other methods; as soon as the water which adheres to it after washing is dried off, it can be taken off the barbecues and stored away at nights to avoid the depredations of thieves; when partially dried it may be stored for weeks if unfavourable weather prevails, and lastly, if properly cured and of a good quality, sells for a higher price than that cured by any other method.

"Chum" is prepared as follows:—The cherry ripe berries after being brought from the field are placed in heaps on the barbecue, in boxes or barrels and turned each day until the outer or "cherry" skin by fermentation, becomes partially decomposed; portions of the resultant mass should then be placed in "mortars" and beaten or pulped. After you have examined and found that the greater portion of the outer skins have separated from the "parchment," wash and treat in the same manner as advised for the curing of parchment.

"Wholeshell" is treated in the same manner as "chum" after removal from the field, but no pulping or subsequent washing is performed after fermentation. It may be immediately spread on the barbecue, and there left exposed to thieves, wind and weather, until about three-quarter dry, if at this stage it has escaped the attention of these, continue drying at your leisure on each favourable occasion until perfectly cured.

There are serious objections to "chum" and "wholeshell" coffee. They take longer to "cure" than "parchment," never attain that permanent dark greenish blue colour so desirable in a well cured sample, and under the most favourable conditions retain to great extent the acrid aroma transmitted to the "beans" by fermentation in conjunction with the outer skins. This is more marked in "wholeshell" and is coupled with a musty flavour. The process of "peeling" whole-shell is also laborious and costly. Only those who have tested really good parchment coffee in opposition to good whole-shell, can judge what a vast difference there is between the two methods of preparing, *i.e.*, market. Coffee to be really good must be thoroughly dried, *i.e.*, until it breaks sharply when bitten between the teeth; it cannot be stored after being peeled for any length of time without the colour becoming much paler (sometimes nearly white) if not thoroughly dry, neither can you get a good sample if the drying process is forced over a fire as is often done by the unscrupulous dealer.

#### **Preparaing for Market.**

A ripe coffee berry consists of the following component parts:—The outer covering or envelope is of a bright cherry red colour and generally contains two fully developed "beans," next comes the parchment which is separated from the outer skin by a gummy or mucus substance which allows the cherry skin to be easily pulped off when quite ripe; each bean is enclosed in its own parchment. Next under the parchment is the "silver" skin, closely adhering to the bean and takes a considerable amount of abrasion to remove it; under that is the bean or marketable produce.

The local trade will purchase coffee in the parchment, chum or whole-shell—of course, at a less price than for the finished product. Clean coffee to fetch the highest price must be divested of all the coverings and the silver skin entirely removed by polishing. To attain this end the small producer after warming in the sun, beats his dry parchment, chum or wholeshell in a mortar, until by friction the coverings are removed; the beans are then separated from the trash by winnowing. The larger grower grinds his in a mill specially made for the purpose, and uses an imported fanner for removing the trash. The largest and most up-to-date planters and merchants use imported hullers (which at the same operation also polish and separate the trash), and graders.

All coffee before being sent to the local market should be "picked," *i.e.*, all particles of trash remaining, malformed, small, broken and discoloured beans should be separated from the perfect ones; these pickings (without the trash) are called "Triage," and can be marketed or used for home consumption in conjunction with the "skimmings." The price paid for triage is very much below that obtained for a good clean sample. The ordinary grower "picks" his product by hand labour; the large producer and merchants by expensive power driven machinery, called graders.