



Vanilla - Myths and Urban Legends

We get a lot of phone calls about 2 basic things. The first is the use of coumarin in some vanilla extracts and the other is whether pure vanilla extract is gluten-free or not.

Gluten-Free or not...

Let take the gluten-free first. All pure extracts (vanilla, lemon, almond) are created using 195 proof (97.5%) grain alcohol. Some would believe that because it is grain alcohol that it would have glutes. Not so! Once alcohol has been refined to the point of being 195 proof there is not much of anything left in the remaining 5%. To make the alcohol any purer, it takes a very expensive process. So, ALL pure extracts are gluten free. If the manufacturer adds corn syrup, you might need to check with them. At Arizona Vanilla Company we do not add corn syrup to our pure vanilla extracts.

Mexican Vanilla and coumarin and rat poison....

Now let's take on the subject of Coumarin in vanilla extracts. First of all coumarin is an extractive of the Tonka bean, along with a few other plants. This substance has been used in tobacco products and artificial vanillas during the first half of the 20th century. It has been found to be toxic to the liver and kidneys. The FDA has been banned as a food substance in the US since the 1978 and it was removed from cigarettes by the tobacco companies in 1997.

Coumarin is not all bad. It is used as an anti-coagulant drug, most notably under the name warfarin. It is also a quite potent rodenticide as rats and other rodents will metabolize coumarin into a very toxic substance that causes massive internal hemorrhaging.

The reason for the back ground is that there is a persistent urban myth that liquid vanilla flavorings and extract produced and imported from Mexico still use coumarin. NO SO!!! Mexico banned the use of coumarin in food in 1964!! This is 14 years before the US FDA did the same thing!!! The problem is that many myths are spread, but no one bothers to check them out!

Now, this is not to say that all Mexican Vanilla is pure vanilla extract! This is also a false hood. Many Mexican Vanillas use some natural vanilla, but then fortify it with synthetic vanilla (known as vanillin) and caramel coloring. This brings up another point. WHITE OR CLEAR VANILLAS ARE SYNTHETIC. Period. Paragraph! Vanilla wants to be brown. No matter how we try to make it another color, it will always turn toward brown.

Pure vanilla extract can have 4 basic ingredients, vanilla extractives, water, alcohol at 35% and a sweetener. Some use corn syrup others might use sucrose or none at all. CHECK THE INGREDIENTS on your bottle of Mexican Vanilla. Also, if you paid a ridiculously low price for your ½ gallon of Pure Mexican Vanilla, chances are it is a synthetic vanilla blend. They manufacturers do this in order to enhance the flavor and aromas of their vanillas, in other words, to make them stronger.

BOTTOM LINE:

- 1) Coumarin does not exist, and has not existed in Mexican Vanillas, pure vanilla extracts or flavorings, for over 40 years.
- 2) ALL extracts are gluten free

