

## What Spice Are You?

by Su Gerheim

This writing prompt piqued my curiosity. Since my cooking with spices expertise amounts to the use of salt and pepper or listening to the Spice Girls, I decided some research was desperately needed. It occurred to me to send a thank you note to Al Gore for inventing the internet, but, instead, I clicked my Explorer and began educating myself. Not entirely to my surprise, I discovered an oceanic archive of spices. It not only humbled me, but levied the weight of a haystack on me. I realized my knowledge could fit through the eye of a needle.

I decided to match characteristics and feelings about myself with descriptions, histories and uses of various spices. Credit is given here to my sister, who collaborated with me on the comparisons. I was grateful for her confirmations and insights into areas I still refuse to admit. I have included copy from the website to illustrate my comparisons.

I chose vanilla. *Vanilla Beans are the long, greenish-yellow seed pods of the tropical orchid plant, Vanilla planifolia. Before the plant flowers, the pods are picked, unripe, and cured until they're dark brown. The process takes up to six months.* The beans length matches my tallness in terms of women's average height. The greenish-yellow seed pods match my feeling when I'm sick and it is a tropical orchid which matches my state of residence, Florida. They are cured until they are dark brown which matches my skin's ability to tan rapidly. Since I do not enjoy sun tanning at the beach, it could take up to six months to notice any results.

*To obtain Pure Vanilla Extract, cured Vanilla Beans are steeped in alcohol. According to law, Pure Vanilla Extract must be 35 percent alcohol by volume.* I can truthfully say, during my youthful eagerness to grow up, I was steeped in alcohol to the point of being permanently 35 percent alcohol by volume. Therefore, I am not only a vanilla bean, but I am pure extract.

*Vanilla Beans have a sweet, perfumed aroma with a woody or smoky flavor.* Obviously, my frequent showers and smoking fits this description.

*Vanilla is one of the most popular flavorings in the world. It is used in flavoring most desserts, including ice cream, custard, cake, candy, and pudding. Vanilla is also used to enhance the flavor of beverages and sauces.* I relied on my sister for the popularity comparison. I do not concern myself with popularity contests, but I definitely like ice cream, custard, cake, candy and pudding and that should count for something. The enhancement quality of vanilla is like my efforts to support the positive side in people.

*Vanilla originated in Mexico, where the Aztecs used it to accent the flavor of chocolate drinks. The Mexican emperor, Montezuma, introduced Vanilla to the Spanish explorer Cortez, who brought it to Europe in the 16th century. The drink, made with Vanilla pods and cacao beans, became popular among the aristocracy in Europe. In 1602, a chemist for Queen Elizabeth I suggested that Vanilla could be used alone as a flavoring.*

The fact that vanilla originated in Mexico agrees with my attitude on temperate climates and anything that is coupled with chocolate cannot be bad. Its first use in chocolate drinks brings to mind Kaluha and Bailey's which I admired much too much years ago. Both my sister and I agreed we were never members of the aristocracy, but my middle name happens to be Elizabeth and it wouldn't take much of a chemist to convince me that vanilla would make a wonderful flavoring.

Yes, I am a vanilla bean, pure extract, tan easily, take a reasonable time to cure, am friendly, try to enhance those with whom I mix, like warmth and adore chocolate. What spice are you?