

The Art of Cold Brew: How to Master Coffeehouse-Quality Cold Brew at Home

A step-by-step guide to selecting beans, perfecting grind size, and mastering ratios for a smooth, coffeehouse-quality brew at home.

Cold brew steeps coffee in cool water rather than brewing it hot and chilling it. Its flavor may seem smooth, but it is not automatically low-acid or gentler on the stomach: one study found comparable pH in hot and cold samples, alongside differences in titratable acidity. [1]

Essential Equipment and Ingredient Selection

Choose a coffee you enjoy rather than relying on a label to guarantee the result. The SCA's current specialty-coffee definition recognizes distinctive attributes and marketplace value; it goes beyond a single numerical score. Roast, origin and processing can all influence what you taste. [2]

Use clean food-contact equipment, potable water and a vessel that fits in the refrigerator. A scale helps you repeat a recipe. A burr grinder is useful, but coffee ground by a roaster is also a practical option.

Mastering the Grind and Coffee-to-Water Ratio

Grind size should suit the brewer and filter. Coarse grinding is common, but it is not mandatory for every cold-brew device: Blue Bottle's bottle recipe uses a medium-fine grind. Follow the equipment recipe first, then adjust one variable at a time. [3]

Record coffee and water quantities. For a bottle-style, ready-to-drink example, Blue Bottle specifies 55 g coffee and 700 ml water. This is a starting recipe for that brewer, not a universal ratio. Concentrated recipes need dilution, so label them clearly. [3]

The Step-by-Step Brewing Process

Use a refrigerated method and follow the brewer's instructions. The sequence below is adapted from Blue Bottle's bottle recipe; a jar-and-filter setup may need different extraction and filtration steps. [3]

1. Measure the coffee for your brewer; for the cited bottle recipe, grind 55 g medium-fine.
2. Place the grounds in the clean strainer and assemble the bottle as instructed.
3. Add 700 ml water, close the bottle and gently move it to wet the grounds.
4. Refrigerate for approximately eight hours, then remove the strainer. This time is specific to the cited bottle method.

After steeping, remove the grounds as directed. The amount of floating material or the darkness of the liquid is not a dependable measure of strength or safety.

Filtration, Storage, and Serving

If using a jar, a clean sieve followed by a suitable coffee filter can help remove sediment. A bottle's built-in filter may make a second stage unnecessary. Filtration improves clarity; it does not sterilize the drink or establish a safe shelf life.

Keep the finished coffee covered and refrigerated, and make small batches. Blue Bottle recommends enjoying its bottle brew within two to three days for flavor. Do not infer a universal 14-day shelf life: Minnesota's retail guidance treats cold brew as temperature-controlled food, requiring brewing and storage at 41°F (5°C) or colder and a seven-day date mark unless a different process is assessed. This commercial rule is not a guarantee for every home batch. [3] [4]

- **Concentrate:** Follow the recipe or manufacturer instructions for dilution, then adjust a serving to taste.
- **Ready-to-Drink:** Serve as prepared or over ice, accounting for the dilution as the ice melts.

Choose a filtration method that suits the brewer and your preferred texture.

Common Mistakes and Troubleshooting

An unpleasant result can reflect the beans, ratio, grind, extraction time or storage. Do not assume that every fine grind over-extracts or that exactly 24 hours marks a universal flavor boundary. Start from a tested equipment recipe and keep notes.

If the drink is too strong, dilute a serving; if it is weak, reduce dilution or adjust the next batch's recipe. Keep brewing and storage hygiene separate from flavor adjustments, and follow any stricter instructions for added milk or other perishable ingredients.



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