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Coffee and beans

Dear Lifehacker, I'm ready to take the plunge into making better coffee, and I've got all my gear picked out—but where can I actually buy the beans? Do I just get them at the grocery store, or is there something better I should get? Is there any way to try out different coffee before I buy a ton?Sincerely, The Best Part of Waking UpDear Best Part of Waking Up, You're absolutely right, great coffee starts with the beans. Don't get us wrong, brewing method is important. That's why we've talked about how to brew the perfect cup, how to make the most of a drip maker, shown you awesome coffee makers beyond drip, talked about how to make great coffee on the cheap, and even the best way to make your coffee portable. Still, the key to a good cup starts with the beans you take home with you. We spent last week learning all about coffee with our friends from Tonx, the fresh roast...Read moreLuckily, you have tons of options, both online and in your neighborhood. Even most small towns these days have at least one decent coffee shop, and as long as you know what you're looking for, you have plenty of options and ways to find the best beans for you.Learn to Judge a Bean By Its Cover (and When You Just Can't)The label on your bag of coffee can tell you a lot, and it can certainly tell you a lot about the freshness, type, and quality of the coffee inside. You won't be able to learn everything, of course, but it can definitely lead you in the right direction, and a little knowledge can take you the rest of the way. Here are some things to look out for:Buy whole bean, freshly roasted: We've mentioned the importance of grinding your own beans enough times before that it should be a no brainer. Whole bean will be harder to find, but you have control over the grind, which is important depending on how you're making it, and your coffee will retain its flavors and natural oils much longer than if you buy pre-ground powered stuff. Seriously, once you start grinding your own, you won't go back. Check out this lesson from our coffee Morning School for more on this topic.Roast date versus "Use By" date: You might have a hard time finding a bag with its roasting date on it, but when you do, support that roaster. Most commercial roasters don't put a date on their bags at all, usually to obfuscate where the coffee is from and when it was roasted and packaged—this allows to them to mix and match batches that were roasted at different times, from different sources. Remember, a "use by" date is better than nothing but a roast date is best. Remember, most of coffee's flavor is in those oils, and those oils dry up and vanish quickly the more time passes between roast and grind.Pick the right type of bean: There are tons of different types of beans, but you'll see the two biggest varieties: Arabica and Robusta. If you have a choice, choose Arabica. Robusta is well known for its bitter, earthier taste, and is often used for instant coffee. Arabica is, for the vast majority of people, what you're looking for. Beyond that, you'll see tons of geographies and varieties of coffee, from Java to Kona to Sumatra. Experiment. There's no one rule to tell you what's good here, there are just too many variables. Explore different regions and tastes—this is where you should try to have fun instead of trying to laser focus on what's good or bad. Keep an eye on the source: Like we said, geography is something your taste buds will have to weigh in on, but source can tell you a lot. Look for single source or single geography in the same bag. Big roasters don't bother because they'll mix and match—whatever's cheapest for them. Single-source may cost you more, but it's worth it. If you see a bag with a specific geography on it, like "Sumatra Mandheling," for example, that means all of the beans in the bag came from the same part of the world. If you see "single estate" on it as well, that means all the beans came from the same farm as well as the same location. See why that might be a good thing?Pick the right roast type: We've said before you should keep an open mind on the roast type, but let's boil it down: Unless you're making espresso, you probably don't need an espresso roast unless you already know you love the flavor. If you hate the deep, strong flavor of coffee, you might consider a light roast. Most people prefer, and usually drink, a "City" roast or a "Vienna" roast. City is lighter, Vienna is most common. If you have choices, start with Vienna—it's probably what you're used to drinking and you can move around from there. This guide from Coffee Crossroads gets into the roast topic in-depth, and hits on some types of roasts you may not see very often.With all of that knowledge, you should be in good position to look at a label and tell what you're getting into. Of course, there's no way to know whether you'll really like a coffee just by reading the label. However, you can tell that a coffee with an old roast date or a rapidly approaching best by date won't be as good, or a bag that's pre-ground or in general from a huge coffee "producer" won't be as good as something you'll get that's fresher from a real roasting company. Hunt for High-Quality Roasters and Coffee Shops In Your AreaLook around for your favorite area coffee shops and roasters. If you live in an area where coffee is popular, you may have your selection of small batch, local roasters willing to sell you beans directly. If not, hit up Yelp or Foursquare and look around your neighborhood for coffee shops that are well reviewed and well liked. Head in for a cup, and see if you can buy a bag of their coffee. Odds are, they have a selection available to sell, and usually it's the coffee they have on the menu as well, so you can have a cup to see if you like it before shelling out for a pound of it. This is actually my favorite way to find new and interesting coffee, and it gives you a real "try before you buy" opportunity that you wouldn't get otherwise. Some of my favorite roasters (Zeke's and Mayorga are just a few examples that are near where I live) are small batch roasters. Others are independently owned coffee shops that roast their own beans and only make them available in-store. Look around, you may find something you like in your own backyard. Plus, you'll spend your money with a local business that could use your support. You may be asking "What about Starbucks, or the grocery store?" Well, Starbucks has made a killing off of the fact that they can sell you their coffee in their stores. Whether you like Starbucks or not, they're not the only place you can go to get a good bag of beans—but if you like Starbucks, go for it—they usually print use by dates (roast dates if you're lucky) on the bag. Your local supermarket probably has a decent selection or brands, but your selection may be mostly ground, big-name brands. Even so, don't count out the big box stores.If you dig coffee, you'll appreciate the Cup of Excellence, a prestigious award given by a tasting...Read moreFind World-Class Roasters that Ship Online and Deliver AnywhereIf you just can't find a decent cup in your area, and the big brand names aren't doing it for you, you still have options. There are tons of high-quality, world-class roasters that are happy to ship their coffee around the globe. We've mentioned some of them before, specifically Intelligentsia Coffee, Counter Culture, Blue Bottle Coffee, Tonx, Mistobox, and Coffee CSA. Tonx and Mistobox are both primarily subscription-based services that deliver different types and roasts to you on the regular. They're great ways to explore new and different roasts, geographies, and flavors without spending too much money. If you want to learn more and explore coffee, they're worth every penny. One thing to note about both services is that if you find a coffee you really like in one of their boxes, you can order a full bag of it. If you and your coworkers are starting a little coffee club, or just want something better than the office push-pot, split the cost of one of these subscriptions and enjoy.MistoBox is a subscription coffee service that delivers freshly roasted artisan coffee to your...Read moreCoffeeCSA is still a subscription, but when you sign up, your money supports specific farmers and their operations. It's like being a part of any CSA: Your relationship is with the farmer who grows the product you enjoy. It's not as cheap as the supermarket, but the coffee you get is incredible, fresh, and delivered directly to your doorstep. They also have subscription plans to suit the amount of coffee you usually drink. If you're looking for amazing beans delivered regularly, and you're into supporting the people behind the things you consume, these are the folks for you. There's more to coffee than pre-ground grocery store blends, and if you're ready to explore it...Read moreIntelligentsia, Blue Bottle, and Counter Culture are all highly regarded for their incredible coffee. All three have subscription programs, but they're not necessarily the core of their businesses. You don't have to know a ton about coffee to shop with any of them, but it certainly helps. You probably won't order anything that you won't like, and many coffee shops just source what they need from one of these three. Hopefully we've given you the information you need to tell good beans from not-so-good ones, and some options to try the next time you want a good cup of coffee. Remember, like any hobby, the bottom line is your personal enjoyment—you can spend as much or as little as you like, and dive as deep into this as you choose, it's up to you. You don't have to spend a lot of money or buy a bunch of specific coffee making gear to get a brew you'll love. Similarly, you don't have to settle just because someone else thinks your tastes or choices are too snobby. Do what you like, explore, experiment, and have fun.Good morning, LifehackerPhotos by Matt Biddulph, Umer Shabib, Mark Warner, and Sam Harrelson. Last Updated on December 18, 2020 Weeknights are wild. There are hobby meetings, sports events, date nights, late-night work calls, kids' bath time, TV show premiers (of course), and there's also... dinner?Trying to cram in making a recipe, eating dinner (let alone enjoying the meal) and cleaning the kitchen in under an hour always seemed like it would take some sort of divine intervention. Well, let me introduce you to the power pressure cooker, aka the game changer.The power pressure cooker makes the impossible possible. You can create a healthy, balanced meal in under an hour from start to finish. Even decadent dishes such as braised short ribs or whole meals such as salmon with potatoes and broccoli can be enjoyed from start to finish with breeze on a weeknight.Is there anything easier than throwing your whole meal in one pot and letting the pot do the work? I can't think of anything. It's as if you significantly upgraded the already kitchen staple, the crockpot. Here are some of my favorite power pressure cooker recipes to get dinner on the table under pressure:1. Ramen SoupFor those nights when all you need is a big hug, ramen is the perfect dish! High in anti-inflammatory ingredients such as fresh ginger, garlic and spinach this 20-minute soup is good for you in every which way.This quick ramen is balanced with lean protein from the chicken and soft-boiled eggs, starches from the noodles, and a salty broth that makes you crave more!To bump this recipe up even more nutritionally, try doubling the carrot and spinach for extra vitamin power.~ Check out the recipe here!2. 4-minute Salmon, Broccoli and PotatoesWhat is better than a perfectly balanced meal in just 4 minutes? I can't think of anything!This wonderfully fatty fish blends so well with the super food broccoli and starch of the potatoes that you won't believe it was done in such a short amount of time!Salmon is a great source of Omega-3 fatty acids (aka fish oil) that helps our heart, skin, joints, GI tract, and much more!~ Check out the recipe here!3. Beef Gyro\$A warm pita wrapped around freshly made gyros, toppings, and even Tzatziki sauce, oh my! This recipe goes from fridge to plate in under an hour with only 15 minutes of prep time!When creating the Tzatziki sauce, be sure to grab plain Greek Yogurt. This yogurt is naturally higher in protein, adding another nutritional benefit to this great dish! You can also opt for a whole wheat pita to add some extra fiber too!~ Check out the recipe here!4. Shrimp BoilThis recipe is perfect for summer beach nights, a classic shrimp boil recipe that you don't have to spend all day preparing! This recipe is fun finger food to the max! It is delicious, satisfying and tastes the best when served on a picnic table.To take this recipe to the next level, adjust the proportions of veggies to protein. By increasing the corn and decreasing the amount of Andouille sausage, you can decrease the total sodium and calories while increasing the fiber and vitamins!~ Check out the recipe here!5. Mexican QuinoaThe perfect one pot meal with fiber, protein, and lots of flavor! This is a vegetarian and meat-lover dream!Quinoa is the perfect substitution for white rice in this classic recipe while complementing the beans to create a protein filled dish. Plus the addition of all those vegetables creates a meal that is bursting with flavor. Top this Mexican quinoa with fresh avocado to perfectly round it out.~ Check out the recipe here!6. Lo MeinThis Lo Mein will stomp any greasy, take-out craving you have without the usual guilt! It is not very often, you can replace a sinful bowl of take-out with something so delicious and easy to make at home!Make this Lo Mein in less than 15 minutes from start to finish. That's faster than it takes for the delivery person to show up at the door!~ Check out the recipe here!7. Whole "Rotisserie" ChickenEveryone knows that the secret to batch cooking is to have a whole chicken cooked to use in various ways throughout the week!This recipe makes the most perfectly moist rotisserie chicken that can be used as is, for tacos, for soup, and for sandwiches all week long!Tip: keep the bones and scraps to make an amazing chicken stock to have on hand! Cooking the stock longer and at a lower temperature will create a delicious bone broth rich in vitamins, minerals and proteins.~ Check out the recipe here!8. Chicken and Lentil SoupThis is the coziest soup around! Rich in protein, fiber, and B vitamins, this soup will meet all your cravings!It also couldn't be easier for a rushed weekday meal, all you have to do is chop and let your power pressure cooker do the work!In just 30 minutes, you will have a warming soup that the whole family can enjoy!~ Check out the recipe here!9. Vegan Quinoa Burrito Bowls\$ there anyone out there that doesn't enjoy a good burrito bowl? This veggie bowl is the perfect one-pot meal that is easily customizable!From vegans to meat-lovers, everyone will enjoy this easy, fiber-rich bowl. Add whatever toppings you please to create a burrito bowl that is just as good as a restaurant's!~ Check out the recipe here!10. Rice and BeansThe classic rice and beans dish is a staple for many reasons. It is full of perfectly complimented proteins, great texture, and balanced seasonings. Now, you can create this filling balanced meal in under an hour! No more pre-soaking those beans!This perfectly seasoned, filling balanced meal will have everyone fighting for another bowl!~ Check out the recipe here!11. Summer Quinoa SaladYour fresh in-season berries were made for this quick salad!Take this nutrient dense salad to a party or serve it as light, summer dinner to have everyone asking for the recipe!The quinoa, fruit, vegetables, and nuts create a dish that is perfectly balanced with all the food groups. You can top this salad with cooked chicken breast or leave it as-is to meet everyone needs!~ Check out the recipe here!12. Minestrone SoupThis Minestrone Soup is quick and veggie full making it perfect for any weeknight dinner! It is rich in Vitamin C, antioxidants, and Vitamin A making it the perfect dinner for the whole family!Tip: Use whole grain noodles to increase the fiber and B vitamins of this tasty dish!~ Check out the recipe here!13. Lemon Garlic ChickenMake your protein and side dish at the same time with flavorful chicken that the whole family will love! In less than an hour, you can have a beautiful and balanced plate with veggies and protein.This flavorful lemon garlic chicken will give you the protein and excitement to spice up any plate!~ Check out the recipe here!14. Chicken FajitasQuick, easy and very few dirty dishes are used to create these fajitas that will rival even your favorite Mexican restaurant! Feel free to top these with whatever you wish but be sure to include fresh avocado for a bump-up in vitamins and minerals.Tip: If you enjoy sour cream on your fajitas, opt for plain Greek yogurt that is higher in protein, lower in calories, and just as tasty!~ Check out the recipe here!15. Coconut Chicken CurryA big bowl of coconut chicken curry over rice is what dreams are made of! This bright, flavorful dish is full of vegetables and lean protein without the dryness!What can usually take a few hours, create this colorful dish in just 30 minutes with your power pressure cooker!~ Check out the recipe here!16. Cashew ChickenThis take-out classic can be on your plate in just 20-minutes but you can pretend you took hours to create it when everyone asks for the recipe! You can double the green bell pepper to increase the veggies without sacrificing any flavor. Serve this classic over brown rice for extra fiber and minerals.~ Check out the recipe here!17. MeatloafMeatloaf has been a menu staple since sliced bread but never did it only take 20 minutes to make! This recipe includes the meatloaf and the sides to create a one-pot dream. Perfect to serve after long weekdays, this dish is a comforting staple.And don't be fooled by the short cooking time, this meatloaf is the best of both worlds- it's juicy and fast to make!~ Check out the recipe here!Despite its apparent roots in the crockpot concept, power pressure cooker meals are apt to be much healthier. Without the need for fatty sauces to create flavor and prevent dryness, the power pressure cooker uses the heat generated by the water to cook the food. This leads to more flavor without dryness and overall leaner meals.The power pressure cooker is the answer for anyone striving for healthy, balanced meals with a crazy weeknight schedule. It really can do it all. You won't be disappointed and you'll feel great after enjoying healthy, balanced meals while easily juggling all the activities you enjoy!Featured photo credit: Unsplash via unsplash.com

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