

FOOD & WINE

5 Ways to Get the Most Out of Your Vanilla Beans, According to Alex Guarnaschelli

Did you know that you can eat the pods?



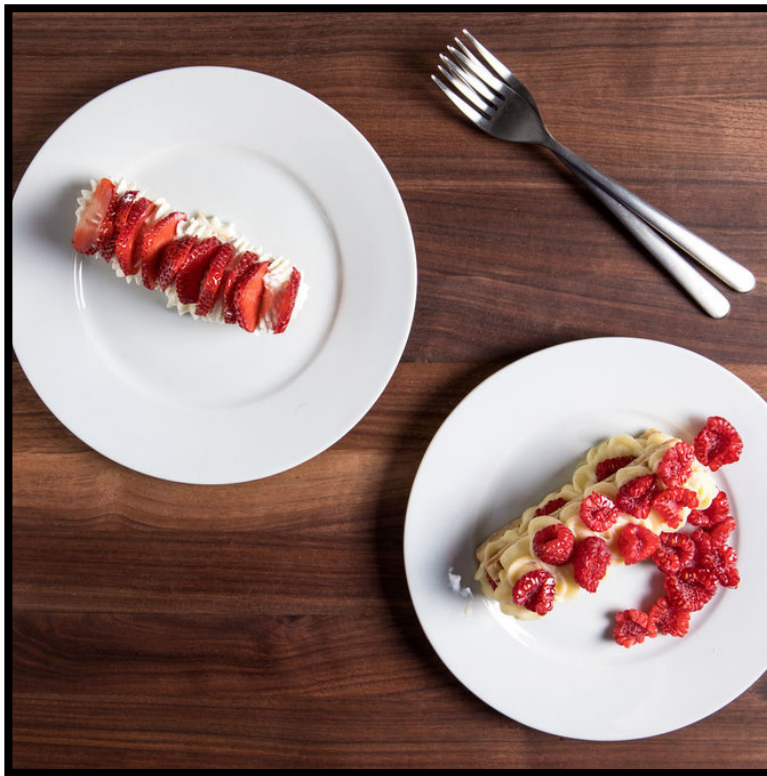
With spring finally upon us, it's time to start looking at fresher and lighter recipes to introduce into your repertoire. Out with dense cakes and in with fruit tarts, for instance, and almost no flavor is more synonymous with spring than vanilla, a delicious and criminally under-utilized ingredient that just about everyone loves.

Vanilla is incredibly versatile and can be added into seemingly anything sweet, and even a few savory dishes, to help the rest of the ingredients truly shine. Among its biggest fans is chef, TV host and cookbook author [Alex Guarnaschelli](#), who recently dropped by [test kitchen](#) to make her delectable strawberry mille feuille.

"The first thing to do with the vanilla beans is flatten them on a cutting board and split them down the middle and scrape out the seeds," Guarnaschelli explains. "That's where the cash money is, the seeds are 70 to 80 percent of what is great about vanilla beans." Once you've got that taken care of, here are five easy ways to get the most out of your vanilla.

Flavor sugar or syrup.

"You can put the beans in sugar and make vanilla infused sugar or make a simple [syrup](#) similarly with equal parts sugar and water," says Guarnaschelli. "Let that cool down and infuse for a couple of days and combine a shot of it with lemon juice and sparkling wine and now you have yourself a great spring cocktail."



Infuse some booze.

While many people simply toss the pods, Guarnaschelli puts them to work. "With the split pods, you can soak them in a jar of bourbon and use both the pod and the infused bourbon, after you let it sit for a few weeks, in a ton of preparations," she explains. "Or just stick the split pods into a bottle of [vanilla extract](#) and then that will further infuse both the extract and the pod itself for later use."

Boost anything dairy-based.

For Guarnaschelli, this classic combination is the optimal way to use vanilla. "The best place to use vanilla beans is anywhere where they won't be mixed in with a million other flavors," she says. "Anything with dairy, yogurt, milk, cream or eggs, any custard or flan, *how* can it be bad?"

Spike your condiments.

"I've thrown vanilla beans into mustard, says Guarnaschelli. "Nothing crazy or grainy, just normal dijon. It's great for [duck](#). Smear some of that right on the duck, coupled with some roast plums, and it all comes together in that savory over sweet over savory over sweet way we all love."

Eat the pods on their own.

Once you've gotten the most of out of the pods, they make a great snack. "You can just drain all of the liquid off the pods, split them completely, scrape them out and dry them in a low oven at 250 degrees for a few hours," she says. "When they come out, they pods are crunchy and you can eat them as is. They're delicious by themselves or roll them in sugar and sprinkle on some lemon or orange [zest](#). Seriously, so simple and so good."