These days, many baristas build their own recipes using their preferred brew ratio. The most common ratio in specialty cafés outside Italy is roughly 1:2 coffee in, to coffee out. This means that, say, 18 g of ground coffee would deliver a double espresso shot that weighed 36 g in the cup. This is typically extracted over 20–35 seconds. In Italy, however, the traditional brew ratio is 1:3 (for a *normale*), or 7 g of coffee resulting in a 21 g single shot. Lower brew ratios (1:2) are considered *ristretto espresso* (restricted espresso), or higher brew ratios (1:4), *lungo espresso* (long espresso).

As always, you will need to experiment to discover what flavor you like best. Try the traditional Italian (1:3) ratio, and from there, you can experiment with other ratios until you find one that works best with your taste preferences and your beans.

Organic or Fair Trade?

Should you choose organic or fair-trade coffee? These, unfortunately, are highly politicized topics that generate varied opinions. While organically grown coffee is most likely better for the environment and for farmworkers, certifications are often difficult to come by, or too expensive for smallholder farmers to obtain. As a result, many smallholders already use natural, low-input, pesticide-free methods, and have done so for generations but aren't able to command the higher prices demanded by the organic certification label. This doesn't mean you shouldn't buy organically certified coffee, but it does mean you shouldn't buy organic coffee *exclusively*.

When it comes to fair trade, a similar story plays out. Farms that obtain fair trade certification are prohibited from using child or forced labor, and in return, fair trade sets a minimum price which ensures more stability and better prices for coffee farmers. This helps to minimize the risk of volatile commodity pricing, and also helps small coffee producers to obtain market access under decent conditions.

However, some observers believe that global certification systems represent a form of neocolonialism. Sociologists Cole and Brown argue in their 2014 paper *The Problem with Fair Trade Coffee* that "embedding the regulation of labor rights in a transnational market" can undermine in-country labor organizing efforts.

Others argue that guaranteeing prices doesn't provide a quality incentive to farmers. It is thought that farmers may reserve their higher-quality coffee for a better price on the open market, while selling the other, lower quality coffee, for a guaranteed minimum price through fair trade. Conversely, some farmers use the extra money to invest in their farms, enabling them to produce better-quality coffee all round.

As far as wide-ranging ethical solutions go, there aren't a whole lot of options available to your everyday coffee consumer, and there is no argument that fair trade can make an immense difference to individual farmers. However, there simply is not enough demand for fair-trade coffee. Only 20 percent of the coffee produced to fair-trade standards can be sold as fair trade. The rest ends up being sold for lower prices on the regular market anyway.

A common alternative is a direct-trade model, which aims to shorten the supply chain and increase transparency. It is often employed within specialty coffee, but is it a good solution? Many specialty exporters, trading companies, and even roasters try to support farmers to reach a quality threshold through farm and education advancement initiatives. However, direct trade brings about its own set of issues, given the politicization of coffee trade—it's become a catch-all marketing term for quality-driven, ethically supplied coffee, and there's no independent body ensuring that coffee transactions meet any set standards. Many coffee companies publish their own ethical standards on their websites instead.

As you can see, there's no perfect solution. The best you can do is be an educated consumer: research your beans and the roaster, and try to find an option that you feel good about.

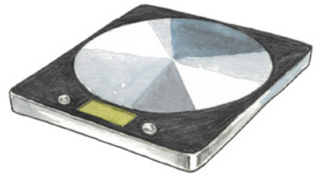
What You'll Need

Measuring cups and spoons

Note that standard sizes differ around the world—the following recipes were developed with U.S measures, but using others will usually not make a big difference.

Scales

Try to find electric scales with a metric setting, that are accurate to 0.1 of a gram.



Coffee beans

Whole beans of good quality, from your preferred origin and roast level. Some recipes call for a specific roast level to achieve the closest to the traditional flavor.

Coffee grinder

Preferably a high-quality burr grinder.
(See Grinding Coffee page 14)

Coffee brewer

You can use your regular coffee brewing equipment if you can't find or don't want to buy the specific equipment listed in each recipe. However, make sure that you are brewing an equivalent strength coffee. For example, you can use a French press or a filter coffee maker interchangeably, but you'll need to dilute espresso or an espresso capsule to achieve the same strength. (See Brewing Coffee page 16)

Fine mesh sieve

Many recipes are brewed in a saucepan or large pot, and will need to be filtered. You could also use a piece of cheesecloth or a coffee filter.

Gooseneck kettle

For many of the recipes, you will need to pour hot water in a slow and steady stream. Baristas use a gooseneck kettle to control the water flow accurately.