



Making Great Espresso

Making great espresso is a matter of finding and coordinating a balance between coffee, espresso machine and grinder (not to mention water, tamper, cups, thermometer, frothing pitcher, etc). Coffee is a complex, natural food product; espresso machines are fine, generally European-made instruments; and grinders come in many shapes and sizes. There is not necessarily as formula or manual for finding a balance between the three, but there are many resources and recommendations available to help.

Below, we have outlined some common problems in making espresso and hopefully shed some light on some helpful solutions. Some experimentation will be in order to brew that perfect cup of espresso, but the rewards will be worth it many times over.

Espresso is weak

Solution #1

Use fresh beans or pods. Simple enough, and vital. Good espresso cannot be made from old coffee beans. Medium and dark roasts are best for making espresso, as the longer roasting times bring out more oils in the beans, which make for better espresso.

Solution #2

Make sure coffee is ground to the correct fineness. A good grinder is as important as the espresso machine. If you don't have a good grinder, either get one, use very-freshly-ground, finely-ground coffee, or use pods. Most espresso machines are highly responsive to the grind. Even a very expensive machine will require some experimentation and honing. A double-shot using the correct grind should take about 20-25 seconds to pull - adjust your grind to meet this standard. A burr grinder is much preferable to a blade grinder for making espresso.

Solution #3

Tamp the grounds. Firmly tamp the ground coffee down into the filter basket - apply approximately 30lbs of force. Tamping helps to force the water through the grounds, which results in better extraction. At the end of the tamping process, twist the tamper a couple of times to "polish" the surface of the grounds. If your machine has a pressurized portfilter (a filter with a small hole in the bottom), less tamping pressure is required.

Solution #4

Make sure your shots are not too big. An espresso shot should be 1 to 1.25 ounces, a double-shot should be 2 to 2.5 ounces - any more and it will become weak.

Espresso is not hot enough

Solution #1

Let the machine warm up before making a shot. Even the the espresso machine's thermostat may say everything is heated and ready to brew, all of the individual parts may not be heated up yet. Depending on boiler material, size of heating element, etc., the time needed for warming up may vary from a few minutes to 45 minutes or so.

Solution #2

Run some hot water through the portafilter before adding coffee. The portafilter, in particular, will absorb lots of heat from the espresso if it is not heated sufficiently. Preheating the portafilter negates this heat loss.

Solution #3

Make sure cup is warm. When running some water through an empty portafilter, you can dispense it into your cup in order to preheat the cup. Alternately, you can preheat the cup by using the cup warmer on the top of your machine, or by using hot water from the faucet.

Solution #4

Thermostat is faulty. Correct temperature (in the portafilter) for making espresso is 190-196 F. If it's below that by much, espresso will be warm and sour; too far above 196 F, and the espresso will be bitter. In a new machine, this shouldn't be an issue.

Frother doesn't froth

Solution #1

Hold milk under frother correctly. Submerge frothing attachment into the milk just enough to where the small hole on the side of the frother is even with the surface of the milk. Gradually lower the frother into the pitcher as the milk is being foamed and the bubbles expand.

Solution #2

Use cold milk. Cold, fresh milk frothes better.

Solution #3

Use correct frothing container. Stainless steel seems to work best.

For a printable view of this chart - [click here](#)

For more information, check out our [Espresso Machine Buying Guide](#)

Also, feel free to [email us](#) or call us toll-free at 866-883-8181

