



BY SARAH HAFIZAH CHANDRA
tribunenew2019@gmail.com

Love it or loathe it, coffee is universal brew

COFFEE has become an indispensable part of many people's daily routines.

Dr Waseem Razzaq Khan from the Faculty of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences at Universiti Putra Malaysia Bintulu Campus (UPMKB) sheds light on the remarkable journey of coffee plants.

He pointed out that coffee plants can grow to be more than 30 feet tall but they are kept short to save energy and make harvesting easier.

Each coffee plant has green and waxy leaves that grow in pairs across from each other and cherry coffee grows on the branches.

"Because it grows in a cycle, it's common for one plant to have flowers, green fruit, and ripe fruit all at the same time. After flowering for the first time, it takes a cherry almost a year to be fully grown and ready to bear fruit.

"Even though coffee plants can live up to 100 years, the best time to harvest is between the ages of seven and 20. With the right care, they can keep producing or even make more over time, depending on the type.

"Most coffee plants give off 10 pounds of coffee cherries or two pounds of green beans every year," he said.

Waseem said *coffea* is the genus of plants that coffee comes from and there are more than 500 genera and 6,000 species of tropical trees and shrubs in this genus.

"Experts say that there are between 25 and 100 different kinds of coffee plants. A Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus was the first person to write about this genus.

"He also wrote about *Coffea Arabica* in his book *Species Plantarum* which came out in 1753. Since then, botanists haven't agreed on the exact classification because coffee plants come in a lot of different types.

"They can be small shrubs or tall trees, and their leaves can be anywhere from one to sixteen inches long and purple, yellow, or dark green," he explained.

Arabica vs. Robusta: The Titans of the Coffee World

Arabica and Robusta are the

two most important types of coffee used in the business world.

Waseem said Arabica coffee descended from the original coffee trees that were discovered in Ethiopia.

These trees grow fine, mild, fragrant coffee that makes up about 70 percent of the world's coffee production.

The beans are longer and flatter compared to Robusta beans, and they have less caffeine.

"A lot of the Robusta coffee in the world comes from Central and Western Africa, Brazil, and parts of Southeast Asia like Indonesia and Vietnam. Robusta production is going up, but it only makes up about 30 percent of the world market.

"Robusta coffee is mostly used in blends and instant coffees. In general, the Robusta bean is a bit rounder and smaller than the Arabica bean.

"It is easier and cheaper to grow the Robusta tree because it is tougher and less likely to get diseases or be eaten by bugs," he explained.

Health Benefits Unveiled: Coffee as a 'Mind-Altering' Elixir

Waseem pointed out that independent scientific evidence has shown that coffee with or without caffeine has many health benefits.

Among the health benefits are making one live longer and lowering the risk of many cancers and long-term diseases.

"More than 90 percent of coffee drinkers in the United States (US) choose caffeinated drinks. On the other hand, decaf is a great choice for people who like the taste and social benefits of coffee but don't need the energy boost that caffeine gives," he

said.

Touching on caffeine and how it exists in coffee beans, Waseem explained that caffeine is a chemical that wakes up one's brain, muscles, heart, and other parts of the body that help keep blood pressure in check.

"This bitter substance can be found in over 60 different plant species' leaves and seeds. Labs can also make caffeine which can then be added to drinks, foods, and medicines.

"Coffee could be seen as a 'mind-altering' drug because it makes you feel more awake. However, the Federal Drug Association America (FDA) has said that small amounts of it are generally thought to be safe in food," he said.

Navigating Caffeine Consumption: How Much is Too Much?

People who drink coffee every day may wonder if there is a "Goldilocks" amount. Waseem confirmed that there is.

"Experts say that you shouldn't have more than 400 milligrams a day if you are healthy. That's how much is in four eight-ounce coffee cups.

"Teenagers should not drink more than one cup of coffee or two cans

of soda a day," he said.

Waseem added that understanding the caffeine content in various beverages and foods, such as dark chocolate, soda, black tea, and energy drinks, is vital for maintaining a balanced caffeine intake.

Voices from the Field: The Role of Coffee in Daily Lives

Waseem reached out to prominent scientists and experts to gather diverse perspectives on the role of coffee in their daily lives.

Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Abdul Latiff Mohamad from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) finds coffee to be a regular part of his routine where he has at least three cups per day.

Prof Dr Fraidah Hanum Ibrahim from INTROP Universiti Putra Malaysia Serdang Campus starts her day with black coffee, emphasising its energising effects.

Prof Mohammad Othman Aljahlali from King Abdul Aziz University, Saudia Arabia reveals an unexpected outcome: coffee helps him sleep.

Associate Professor Dr Maulana Magiman from Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Faculty of Humanities, Management, and Science prefers 'tea tarik' but he enjoys drinking coffee when he is in stress as it makes him feel better.

Dr Zamri Rosli from UPMKB's Faculty of

Agricultural and Forestry Sciences attests to coffee's mind-refreshing qualities, stating that it offers him extra energy and eases stress.

Dr Fauziah Abu Bakar from UPMKB's Faculty of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences opts for hot chocolate, highlighting the subjective nature of coffee preferences. Dr Syeed

Saiful Azry Osman Al Edrus and Dr Mugunthan Perumal from UPMKB's Institut Ekosains Borneo share their unique experiences with coffee, emphasising its importance in their daily routines.

Associate Professor Dr Wong Tze Jin from UPM and Associate Professor Dr Roland Kueh Jui Heng from UPMKB's Faculty of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences showcase the varying effects of coffee, with one transitioning to green tea and the other experiencing increased blood pressure.

Vice President 5G & IoT, Gulf region Huawei Dr Abdul Razzaq Memon underscores the significance of coffee in his daily work routine.

Dr Shazali Johari Heng from UPMKB's Faculty of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences and chief executive officer of Enggang (Pekan) Sdn Bhd, Dr Jane Koh both attribute coffee to making their days easier and waking them up in the morning.

A Brew of Personal Choices

In the midst of these diverse opinions, the conclusion remains open-ended. Whether coffee is viewed as a health elixir or a potential source of discomfort is subjective.

As Jane Koh aptly puts it, "ultimately, it is up to you to decide whether coffee is good or bad for your health."

"A lot of the Robusta coffee in the world comes from Central and Western Africa, Brazil, and parts of Southeast Asia like Indonesia and Vietnam. Robusta production is going up, but it only makes up about 30 percent of the world market."

