

Coffee Botany



The coffee plant is an evergreen, flowering shrub that can grow to the size of a small tree, up to about 12 feet in height when mature (although the size can vary greatly among different cultivars). Coffee trees will produce fruit at about three- to five-years old and will continue producing for 50 to 60 years. From flowering to harvest, it takes about nine months for the plants to produce ripe cherries.

A coffee tree produces red or purple epigynous berries that are called “cherries.” These cherries are comprised of several layers. The outermost layer is the skin (No. 7 in the figure below). Inside the skin is the pulp or mucilage layer (No. 6). Little is said about the pectin layer (No. 5), presumably it is removed with the mucilage. The next layer is known as the parchment or hull (No. 4). Inside the parchment is the silverskin (No. 3), also known as chaff when roasting. The beans are at the center of the cherry (No. 2), and there are generally two of them. Single beans occur in a small percentage of cherries, and are known as a “peaberries.” The peaberry is considered a defect by some and a delicacy by others.

