

Living

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What ever happened to Mexican vanilla?

BY KATE BIELAMOWICZ
The News

Aromatic vanilla is native to Mexico, yet the country only produces 1 percent of the world's supply, said Óscar Mora Domínguez of Finica Xanath, a vanilla farm in Veracruz.

Mora Domínguez is part of a small group of Mexican vanilla producers who are working to rescue Mexican production, as well as the species vanilla planifolia, which is in danger of extinction according to report by the National

Commission for Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity.

"Vanilla is lost to us. Vanilla in Mexico is like looking at something in a museum. It's ancient," Mora Domínguez said.

"But it isn't that. It shouldn't be that. It's a candy, a honey, a mole, a coffee, a perfume. It's a reflection. It's a medicine. It's us. It's ours," he said. And it's true. Nine of the 15 Mesoamerican aromatic vanilla species are found in Mexico.

The plant was first discovered by the Totonaco in the northern areas of Veracruz and Puebla. It is a cultural symbol and an economic one in the region.

Yet the current problem, says Mora Domínguez is that although there is demand for natural vanilla, the production doesn't exist. Natural vanilla production is

not a quick and easy process, either. The average vanilla plant takes 3 to 4 years to produce, said Mora Domínguez.

His farm, Finica Xanath, does every step of the harvesting vanilla, including pollination.

"Some days we might pollinate 5,000 flowers by hand. Imagine that when vanilla flowers only last half a day," he said. "It's a lot of cost and a lot of production."

For this reason, Mora Domínguez is advocating a combined effort between businesses and producers to help drive the production of Mexican vanilla and reach the demand that is otherwise unmet due to economic and ecological issues.

Some organizations are taking notice, particularly the Mexican Orchidology Association (AMO) and the Franz Mayer Museum.

They are specifically featuring vanilla in their upcoming exhibition, "Orquídeas. Otoño 2014" ("Orchids. Autumn 2014").

Vanilla, after all, is a type of orchid.

"It's one of the oldest types of orchids," said Eduardo Pérez, president of AMO and National Autonomous University of Mexico professor.

Vanilla is endemic to Mexico but the majority of vanilla consumed in Mexico is artificial, Pérez said.

Orchid festival organizers are hoping that platform will help grow awareness about Mexican vanilla and drive production efforts.

"We have contacted various producers of vanilla to come and showcase their products so that the people might become more familiar with Mexican vanilla," said Pérez.

"The idea is that the consumer has direct access to the producer," he said.

Finica Xanath vanilla farm is one of those producers.

Vanilla in Mexico is like looking at something in a museum. It's ancient. **MORA DOMÍNGUEZ**
Mexican vanilla producer

WEEKLY EVENT CALENDAR

OCTOBER 17 TO 19 AFFORDABLE ART

Art ownership is not just for the wealthy. The Affordable Art Fair makes it possible for just about everyone to obtain a great piece with prices ranging from 999 pesos to 99,000.

Time: Friday 1 p.m., Saturday 12 p.m. and 11 a.m.

Entry: 75 pesos (students) 150 pesos

Location: Expo Reforma: Morelos 67 Juárez

feature more than a dozen shows transmitted from Guanajuato to Mexico City, via streaming. The 42nd edition themes include: Shakespeare 450, to commemorate the birthday of the English playwright and frontier; a reflection on the limits in various areas such as art and ideologies. **Location:** multiple events in Guanajuato and León
More info: www.festivalcervantino.gob.mx

UNTIL JANUARY 18 POLKA DOT ART

The iconic work of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama will be on display in Mexico. Kusama is famous for her reverent use of polka dot art.

Time: Tuesday to Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Entry: 19 pesos, free admission for students, teachers and seniors with current i.d. Free admission on Sundays

Location: Museo Tamayo, Paseo de la Reforma 51, Bosque de Chapultepec, Miguel Hidalgo delegation

UNTIL JANUARY 4 OCTAVIO PAZ THROUGH ART

Writer, poet and diplomat Octavio Paz might be best known for his novel, "The Labyrinth of Solitude," depicting the duality of Mexican culture. Nevertheless, Bellas Artes is showcasing an exhibit in his honor, with works of art that embody the larger-than-life themes of which he wrote.

Time: Tuesday to Sunday 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Entry: 43 pesos
Location: Palacio de Bellos Artes, Juárez s/n, Centro Histórico 06050

UNTIL OCTOBER 19 DESIGN WEEK MEXICO

Design Week Mexico celebrates architecture and design throughout the city with installations, exhibitions, art walks, conferences, documentaries and even food trucks.

Time: Oct. 15 to 19

Entry: varies

Location: varies
Consult www.designweekmexico.com for specific times and locations.

UNTIL JANUARY 4 TRAVEL WITH PICTURES

In the new exhibition "¡Vamónos! Bernard Plossu en México" we see the Mexican landscape through the lens of French photographer Bernard Plossu who made four trips to Mexico, road tripping across its deserts, roaming its jungles and exploring its cities with an honest eye.

Time: Tuesday to Sunday 10:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Entry: 26 pesos

Location: Museo del Arte Moderno, Reforma s/n, Bosques de Chapultepec, 11560

UNTIL OCTOBER 19 ORCHID SALE

As a founding member of the Mexican Orchidology Association, the Franz Mayer Museum is holding a week long orchid exhibition featuring art, conferences and a flower sale. This year's theme is vanilla, which as many don't know is a species of orchid, as well.

Time: Tuesday to Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Entry: 45 pesos

Location: Hidalgo 45, Cuauhtémoc, Centro Histórico 06300

UNTIL NOVEMBER 1 CERVANTES' GREATEST

This year, the International Cervantes Festival will

EVERY SUNDAY YOGA FOR A GOOD CAUSE

Every Sunday, Mukta Yoga features "Altruistic Sundays" in which the proceeds from each class go to different charitable foundation. Each Sunday features a different instructor and a different style of yoga.

Time: Sunday 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Entry: 100 pesos

Location: Mukta Yoga, Amsterdam 171, Hipódromo Condesa 06170



"Whenever you smell real vanilla, you crave it. This is the connection we want to make," said Franz Mayer Museum Director Héctor Rivero Borrell Miranda.

"Orquídeas. Otoño 2014" will feature orchid exhibitions, photography, products for sale, educational workshops and conferences, many of which will be geared toward the preservation and cultivation of Mexican vanilla.

"People often go to the orchid sale, but not the conferences, which is why we picked vanilla as a theme," said Professor Rebeca López of AMO. "It's our country's 'black gold.'"

The orchid festival will be held from Oct. 15 to 19 at the Franz Mayer Museum in Mexico City. Over 300 plants from 60 different species will be on display.

EXHIBIT INFO

"ORQUÍDEAS. OTOÑO 2014"

• "Orquídeas. Otoño 2014" will be from Oct. 15 to 19 at the Franz Mayer Museum.

• The Franz Mayer Museum is located at Hidalgo 45, Centro Histórico 06300 (Tel: 5518 2266)

• It is open Tuesday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

• General admission is 45 pesos, while teachers, students, seniors

and children pay 25 pesos.

• For more information visit either the museum website at <http://www.franzmayer.org.mx> or the Mexican Orchidology Association website at <http://www.amo.com.mx>