



Edmond Albius and the Great Vanilla Discovery

Orchids are one of the largest families of plants on Earth, with nearly 28,000 species! You can find them growing just about anywhere, from dry deserts to alpine forests, and even the prairies of Iowa. In fact, the only place orchids don't grow is Antarctica.

Orchids are responsible for making ice cream and baked goods especially tasty. The seed pods from the vanilla orchid (*Vanilla planifolia*) are used to produce vanilla extract. We wouldn't be able to enjoy vanilla today without the work of a man named Edmond Albius.

In the wild, vanilla orchids are pollinated by bees and hummingbirds. For commercial vanilla production, however, vanilla orchids must be pollinated by hand, a time-consuming and difficult process. Edmond Albius revolutionized the cultivation of vanilla by inventing a technique of hand-pollination that changed the vanilla industry forever. Albius discovered that he could pollinate the vanilla orchid by using a thin stick or blade to manipulate the flower and gently moving the pollen to the flower's stigma with his thumb.



At the time of his discovery, Edmond Albius was 12 years old and enslaved on a plantation in Réunion, an island in the Indian Ocean. Due to his discovery, Réunion became the world's largest supplier of vanilla and many planters prospered in response. Albius eventually gained his freedom, but never received financial benefit or widespread recognition for his discovery.

His pollination technique is still used today, even by horticulturists here at the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden!



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To celebrate Edmond Albius and his pollination technique, use our chocolate chip cookie recipe and be sure to thank him the next time you enjoy some vanilla ice cream or a chocolate chip cookie.

Chocolate Chip Cookies

One Bowl, Small Batch

INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup butter, softened
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 2 tbsp white sugar
- 1 egg yolk
- ½ tsp vanilla
- ½ cup + 1 tbsp flour
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp baking soda
- ¼ cup chocolate chips (dark, milk or white)

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Line baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.
2. Cream together butter, brown sugar and white sugar until smooth with a handheld or standing mixer.
3. Once creamy, add egg yolk and vanilla until combined.
4. Shift mixture to one side of the bowl. Add flour, salt and baking soda and gently mix.
5. Use a spoon to stir dry ingredients into wet to fully combine.
6. Fold in chocolate chips.
7. Place into freezer for about ten minutes. This will keep your cookies from spreading too much.
8. Remove from freezer and use a cookie scoop to spoon dough onto lined baking sheet. ~About two tablespoons each.
9. Bake for 9-11 minutes or until lightly brown on edges.
10. Remove and allow to cool completely. Enjoy!

NOTES

- Store baked cookies in airtight container on counter for up to one week.
- You can freeze dough in pre-scooped portions and bake them straight from the freezer.
- Bake for 12-13 minutes if cookies are frozen.