

Roast Levels: How Dark, and Why

Where to stop the roast, what it does to the cup, and which customer it is for. Roast names are not standardized; the cracks are.

Roast	Stop the roast	Weight lost	The bean looks	The cup tastes	Best brewed as	Roast it when	Do not roast it when
Cinnamon (too light)	At the start of first crack	10–11%	Pale tan, dry, tight crease	Sour, grassy, peanut, thin	Nothing	Never, for sale	Always. This is the under-developed roast that gives light coffee a bad name.
City (light)	As first crack finishes	about 12.7%	Light brown, dry, textured	Bright and acidic; floral, citrus and fruit; light body	Pour-over, hot or flash-chilled	The coffee is a washed Ethiopia or Kenya and the point is its origin	The coffee is a Brazil or Sumatra (flat and woody this light), or it will go in milk
City+ (medium-light)	30–60 seconds after first crack ends	about 13.3%	Medium brown, dry	Sweet, clear origin flavor, moderate acidity	Pour-over, drip, AeroPress	A Colombia or Guatemala is the single-origin on the table	The customer says they "don't like sour coffee"
Full City (medium)	On the verge of second crack, before it starts	about 14.5%	Deeper brown, mostly dry, a spot of sheen	Balanced: caramel, nuts, chocolate; fuller body, gentle acidity	Drip, French press, pour-over	It is the house coffee. This is the roast most people mean by "coffee".	The coffee is a delicate, expensive washed lot; its origin flavor is fading here
Full City+ (medium-dark)	At the first snaps of second crack	about 15.1%	Dark brown, patchy oil	Bittersweet chocolate, heavy body, low acidity; roast flavor arriving	French press, moka, espresso, cold brew, coffee with milk or honey	The coffee is a Brazil natural or Sumatra, or it is for milk drinks	The roaster is a Behmor and the batch is a full pound: drop to 12 oz
Vienna to French (dark)	Through second crack	about 15.6%	Very dark, oily surface	Smoky, bittersweet, heavy; origin largely gone	Phin with condensed milk; anyone who asks for "dark"	The coffee is a cheap, dense Brazil or a robusta. Expensive beans are wasted here.	The roaster is a Behmor (its manual stops 10 seconds into second crack)
Italian / Spanish (burnt)	Well past second crack	16.6% and up	Black, wet-looking	Char, ash, carbon	Nothing	Never	Always. Fire risk rises sharply: this is where beans ignite.

- **The landmarks are sounds.** First crack is a loud pop, like popcorn, at about 390–410 °F. Second crack is a faster, fainter snap, at about 440–450 °F. A thermometer's reading depends on where the probe sits; the cracks do not.
 - **Beans keep roasting until they are cool.** Stop a shade lighter than the roast wanted, and cool fast.
 - **Dark is not stronger.** A dark roast tastes bolder but has slightly less caffeine by weight and far less origin flavor. Strength in the cup is dose and ratio.
 - **What people say they drink** (NCA, spring 2025): medium 63%, dark 35%, light 12%. Light is strongest among under-40s.
- **Rest before brewing or selling:** at least 12–24 hours. Sell within about two weeks of the roast date.
 - **Weight lost** is the easiest way to repeat a roast: weigh the batch in and out and write the percentage down.
 - **Agtron numbers** measure roast color on ground coffee, and a higher number is lighter: cinnamon 85–90, medium about 60, French or Italian 30–35. The trade's cupping roast is 63. A "tile" (#95 down to #25) is a color disk standing for that reading.