

Do It for the Climate ECO-FRIENDLY COFFEE

BY REBECCA GAO • Shopping for coffee can be overwhelming—especially if you're under-caffeinated. Most of us just want something tasty that perks us up on dark winter mornings, but not only are you picking between roasts, flavours, brands and whole bean vs. pre-ground, there are also a bunch of sustainability claims and labels to decipher. How it's farmed really matters: Coffee is one of the biggest tradable commodities in the world, and its environmental footprint is massive.

Coffea arabica, one of the original species of coffee cultivated, is native to Ethiopia, and has typically been grown within rainforests, shaded by the tree canopy. More recently, however, farmers worldwide have switched over to cultivating species that can be grown in the sun, like *Coffea canephora* or *robusta*. These varieties are more resistant to crop-killing diseases and produce more coffee. But more than 2.5 million acres of forest in Central America have been permanently cleared to make way for coffee farms. This deforestation causes soil erosion, threatens animal habitats and biodiversity and contributes to climate change.

Some consumers are rightfully skeptical of companies' self-declared claims, but ecolabels really do help us pick products that are sustainably and ethically sourced. An ecolabel "is a visible sign from some independent organization that a particular coffee producer or batch of coffee has followed an independently created set of rules or standards that are designed to reduce their environmental impact," says Hamish van der Ven, an expert in sustainable business management of natural resources at the University of British Columbia.

Of course, ecolabels aren't perfect. Coffee is grown around the world, and operations

can span continents and oceans (like a Canadian roaster sourcing beans from Ethiopia). Sometimes it's impossible for auditors to spot everything. But a "third-party certification is still better than no certification," says van der Ven.

Here are a few of the most common ecolabels and what they really mean.

BIRD FRIENDLY certifies beans that are organic, shade-grown and farmed in such a way that the foliage cover, tree height and biodiversity create a quality habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. Many species of migratory birds that breed here in Canada (and consume insects, helping our trees produce oxygen and absorb carbon) have also been observed at these shade-grown coffee plantations.

FAIRTRADE ensures that small-scale farmers, who are bearing the brunt of climate change, have decent working conditions and are paid fairly for their labour. Fairtrade also promotes sustainable growing techniques (like planting shade trees and collecting and reusing rainwater).

CANADA ORGANIC certifies coffee grown without synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, which decrease soil biodiversity and destabilize local ecology. Instead, organic farmers promote soil fertility and manage weeds, pests and diseases using biological and mechanical methods such as rotating crops, composting and introducing beneficial, pest-eating insects.

RAINFOREST ALLIANCE certifies farms that follow sustainable agricultural standards, but some experts believe its criteria are not stringent enough. Farms must maintain and increase the diversity of natural vegetation and take steps to support the ecosystem, and farms that have destroyed natural ecosystems since 2014 cannot be certified.

GET BREWING



[1]

BALZAC'S ATWOOD BLEND

The Atwood blend, named after the iconic Canadian writer, is a certified Canada Organic and Bird Friendly blend with notes of caramel and cocoa. Balzac's also donates a dollar of each pound of this coffee sold to the Pelee Island Bird Observatory in southern Ontario, which is devoted to the study and conservation of migratory birds. *\$17 for 340g, shop.balzacs.com*

[2]

CAFÉ AVIA BIRD FRIENDLY

Québec-based Café Avia's Bird Friendly blend contains 100 percent Bird Friendly, Canada Organic and Fairtrade coffee. Each purchase supports Nature Canada's Bird Friendly City program. *\$17 for 342g, cafebirdfriendly.org*

[3]

CANADIAN HERITAGE ROASTING COMPANY GRIZZLY

This whole bean medium roast has rich dark chocolate notes and is certified Canada Organic. Eco-bonus: For every bag sold, Canadian Heritage Roasting plants a tree on Canadian soil. *\$18 for 340g, canadianheritageroastingco.com*

[4]

PRESIDENT'S CHOICE COSTA RICA

This medium roast has a sweet aroma and balanced body and acidity. Grown in Costa Rica's tropical rainforest, this coffee is Rainforest Alliance certified. Plus, it comes in recyclable containers. *\$8 for 340g, lolblaws.ca*

[5]

AVES YELLOW-BREADED CHAT

Aves is an Oshawa, Ont.-based company that prioritizes Bird Friendly coffees with appropriately named blends. Their Yellow-Breasted Chat whole bean coffee comes from a farm in El Salvador that also carries the Rainforest Alliance certification. *\$19 for 340g, avescoffeeco.com*

